

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

How to work out the answer even if you don't know all the words!

There are also hints and tips on how to discover the meaning without needing your dictionary, too.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

or **How to work out the answer even if you don't know all the words**

In your GCSE examination you will sometimes need to understand or use words which you haven't met before. Don't panic! This is where you need communication strategies or ways of working out the answer even if you don't know all the words. The next few pages give you plenty of tips. Use these and your common sense and you will find life much easier.

Understanding words when Listening and Reading

In the examination, as in real life, when you are listening to someone speaking French, you don't have time to use a dictionary. When you are reading French, you would quickly lose the thread if you had to look up every word. So you need some help in finding the meaning quickly, without any help from anywhere else.

It will help to ask yourself a few simple questions.

Do I need to read or listen to every word?

Sometimes the same thing will be written or said more than once, in different ways. Sometimes there will be extra information which you do not need in order to answer the question. In both cases, you need to know what's important and what you can ignore.

To help you pick out the information you really need to know so that you can answer the question

- make sure you really understand the question set
- decide what kind of question it is – is it asking for details, or for an overall impression?
- watch out for the words which will help you answer it, and ignore the rest.

Asking for details:

For example

"The girl was tall and thin, with brown hair. Her coat and shoes were blue. She stopped at the kiosk and bought a newspaper."

Question: "What colour were her clothes?"

To answer this you need to watch out only for words for **colours** and **clothes**. You can ignore the rest of the sentence, because you don't need the other words to answer this question.

Asking for an overall impression:

When the question asks you to sum up what you have heard or read, or give an overall impression, you will probably need to gather clues from different places in the text. In this kind of question it is very important not to make snap judgements from just one or two words – you need to read or listen right through to the end before you decide on your answer.

For example

“Although he didn’t have much money, Jim always tried to help other people. Jim was small and thin and his clothes were old but he would rather give a few pence to charity than spend money on himself.”

Question: “What does this tell you about Jim’s character?”

To answer this, you need to watch out for the words which tell you about the kinds of things Jim **did**. The question **isn’t** asking you what Jim looked like, so you can ignore the words which tell you about his appearance and concentrate on the ones which tell you how he behaved.

Are there any useful clues in the sentence?

The rest of the sentence can help you to work out the meaning of a word you don’t know. The following sentences contain made-up words, but you can make a reasonable guess at what **kind** of things they are from the rest of the sentence.

“The man was wearing a *fizzo* on his head.” (some kind of hat).

“ The woman was accompanied by a long-haired *bilpo* on a long lead.”
(some kind of animal)

Intelligent guesswork of this kind can help you to make an attempt at the answer.

How can my knowledge of grammar help me?

If you know about how plurals of words are formed, how different tenses are made and such things as the rules for making words agree with each other, you will have some idea of what kind of unknown word you are dealing with. This can help you to make an intelligent guess at its meaning.

Look at this example in English: “The hungry cows waited at the gate.”

Here are some of the things which you know about English and which would help in working out what kind of words you are dealing with.

- Adding ‘-s’ usually makes a noun plural in English
- Adding ‘-ed’ to a verb usually makes a verb into the past tense
- A word between ‘the’ and a noun is often an adjective describing the noun

Using clues of this kind in French can help you to find your way through the sentence and to work out

- what kind of word you are dealing with
- how the sentence as a whole fits together

What do I know about the French way of life?

If you know something about the country and the way of life of the people whose language you are studying, you will have a better chance of working out what something means.

For example, your knowledge of the money they use could help you. It is obvious, from your knowledge of British currency, that

- “They paid three pence for the cinema tickets” is nonsense, but
- “They paid three pounds for the cinema tickets” makes sense.

Knowledge of this kind can also help you in making sense of French

Are there any patterns in the language to help me?

It can help you to unravel the meaning of a word if you understand how the word itself has been put together. Look particularly for *prefixes* (letters added to the front of a word) and *suffixes* (letters added to the end of the word).

For example

- the prefix '**re-**' often gives the idea of 'again' or 'back', eg.

<i>commencer</i>	-	to start
<i>recommencer</i>	-	to start again
<i>venir</i>	-	to come
<i>revenir</i>	-	to come back
<i>entrer</i>	-	to go in
<i>rentrer</i>	-	to go back in (to go back home)

- the prefix '**in-**' often acts like the English prefix 'un-', eg.

<i>connu</i>	-	known
<i>inconnu</i>	-	unknown
<i>utile</i>	-	useful
<i>inutile</i>	-	useless

- the suffix '**-ment**' is often '-ly' in English, eg.

<i>certainement</i>	-	certainly
<i>exactement</i>	-	exactly
<i>extrêmement</i>	-	extremely
<i>généralement</i>	-	generally

<i>lentement</i>	-	slowly
<i>normalement</i>	-	normally
<i>vraiment</i>	-	really
<i>malheureusement</i>	-	unfortunately
<i>rapidement</i>	-	quickly

- the suffix '**-ette**' often makes something smaller, eg.

<i>la maison</i>	-	house
<i>la maisonette</i>	-	small house, cottage
<i>la fille</i>	-	girl
<i>la fillette</i>	-	little girl
<i>le cigare</i>	-	cigar
<i>la cigarette</i>	-	cigarette

All words like *cassette*, *allumette*, *serviette*, *fourchette* tell you that they are small objects.

- the suffix '**-té**' is like the English '-ty' on the end of a noun, eg.

<i>l'hospitalité</i>	-	hospitality
<i>l'identité</i>	-	identity
<i>l'université</i>	-	university
<i>la spécialité</i>	-	speciality
<i>la publicité</i>	-	publicity, advert

- the suffixes '**-ier**' and '**-ière**' on jobs show whether it is a man or a woman, eg.

<i>un fermier</i>	-	farmer
<i>une fermière</i>	-	woman farmer
<i>un ouvrier</i>	-	worker (m)
<i>une ouvrière</i>	-	worker (f)
<i>un cassier</i>	-	cashier (m)
<i>une cassière</i>	-	cashier (f)

- the suffixes '**-eur**' and '**-euse**' do the same, eg.

<i>un vendeur</i>	-	shop assistant (m)
<i>une vendeuse</i>	-	shop assistant (f)
<i>un serveur</i>	-	waiter
<i>une serveuse</i>	-	waitress

Understanding words when Reading

Here are some extra hints to help you understand words which you have not met before when you are reading. Try asking yourself the following questions.

Are any words the same as in English?

There are a lot of words which look the same as in English and have the same, or almost the same meaning. These words are often called *cognates*. They can help you to understand words you don't know in French, though you do need to be careful, as you'll see below.

Here are some *cognates*

<i>le garage</i>	-	garage
<i>le taxi</i>	-	taxi
<i>le poster</i>	-	poster
<i>le piano</i>	-	piano
<i>le sport</i>	-	sport
<i>la date</i>	-	date
<i>l'Europe</i>	-	Europe
<i>orange</i>	-	orange
<i>le ticket</i>	-	ticket
<i>le ski</i>	-	ski
<i>la sauce</i>	-	sauce
<i>le village</i>	-	village
<i>la photo</i>	-	photograph
<i>le magazine</i>	-	magazine
<i>le concert</i>	-	concert
<i>direct</i>	-	direct
<i>le fruit</i>	-	fruit
<i>le week-end</i>	-	weekend
<i>le sandwich</i>	-	sandwich

And some *near-cognates* – words which have *nearly* the same spelling in French as in English. These are listed on the next page.

<i>l'âge</i>	-	age
<i>la personne</i>	-	person
<i>le short</i>	-	shorts
<i>le porc</i>	-	pork
<i>le jus</i>	-	juice
<i>la musique</i>	-	music
<i>l'histoire</i>	-	history
<i>l'adulte</i>	-	adult
<i>sérieux</i>	-	serious
<i>l'oncle</i>	-	uncle
<i>l'orchestre</i>	-	orchestra
<i>l'examen</i>	-	exam
<i>la lampe</i>	-	lamp

BEWARE! There are also a few 'false friends' – words which look the same in French and English but have **different** meanings. Watch out for words such as

<i>grand</i>	-	big
<i>la place</i>	-	square, seat, room
<i>la journée</i>	-	day
<i>la pièce</i>	-	room, coin, play
<i>le parking</i>	-	car park
<i>large</i>	-	wide
<i>la cave</i>	-	cellar
<i>joli</i>	-	pretty
<i>la veste</i>	-	jacket
<i>mince</i>	-	slim
<i>le médecin</i>	-	doctor
<i>la monnaie</i>	-	change
<i>le slip</i>	-	briefs
<i>le car</i>	-	coach
<i>le crayon</i>	-	pencil
<i>les affaires</i>	-	business
<i>le pain</i>	-	bread
<i>les baskets</i>	-	trainers

What else helps?

There are a lot of words in French which you can understand if you know a few simple spelling rules. These will help you to work out what the word is in English.

Here are some examples:

- Words which end in '-ie' in French often end in '-y' in English, eg.

<i>la technologie</i>	-	technology
<i>la biologie</i>	-	biology
<i>la géographie</i>	-	geography
<i>la Normandie</i>	-	Normandy

- Words with a circumflex often have an extra 's' in English, eg.

<i>coûter</i>	-	To cost
<i>août</i>	-	August
<i>la côte</i>	-	Coast
<i>l'hôtesse de l'air</i>	-	Air hostess
<i>le château</i>	-	castle
<i>la fête</i>	-	feast, festival
<i>l'hôpital</i>	-	hospital
<i>le rôti</i>	-	roast

- French verbs without the infinitive ending '-er' sometimes look like English verbs, eg.

<i>admirer</i>	-	to admire
<i>payer</i>	-	to pay
<i>détester</i>	-	to detest, hate
<i>continuer</i>	-	to continue
<i>téléphoner</i>	-	to telephone, ring up
<i>signer</i>	-	to sign
<i>visiter</i>	-	to visit
<i>refuser</i>	-	to refuse
<i>proposer</i>	-	to propose/suggest

- The '-ant' ending is often '-ing' in English:

<i>intéressant</i>	-	interesting
<i>amusant</i>	-	amusing
<i>passionnant</i>	-	exciting
<i>charmant</i>	-	charming
<i>pendant</i>	-	during

- The '-eux' ending is often '-ous' in English:

<i>religieux</i>	-	religious
<i>délicieux</i>	-	delicious
<i>sérieux</i>	-	serious
<i>joyeux</i>	-	joyous, happy
<i>dangereux</i>	-	dangerous

- The '-ique' ending is often '-ic' in English:

<i>l'Atlantique</i>	-	the Atlantic
<i>la musique</i>	-	music
<i>dynamique</i>	-	dynamic
<i>électronique</i>	-	electronic
<i>la physique</i>	-	physics
<i>la plastique</i>	-	plastic

Understanding words when Listening

It is easier to use guidelines when you are reading than when you are listening to French because you have more time to stop and think about the unknown word and the words around it. All the same, there are some ways in which you can help yourself.

Are any words the same as in English?

There are many words which sound the same, or almost the same as in English, and have the same meaning, such as

<i>l'âge</i>	- age
<i>normal</i>	- normal
<i>le week-end</i>	- weekend
<i>le ski</i>	- ski
<i>la télévision</i>	- television
<i>la classe</i>	- class
<i>le groupe</i>	- group
<i>l'animal</i>	- animal
<i>le bus</i>	- bus
<i>le film</i>	- film
<i>la soupe</i>	- soup

How else can I help myself?

Some words which look the same as in English do not sound the same, but if you know something about *sound patterns* in French, you will find them easier to recognise. Here are some examples where knowing sound patterns can help.

The sound 'ee' will almost always be spelt with the letter 'i' in French:

<i>le riz</i>	- rice
<i>la ville</i>	- town
<i>lire</i>	- to read
<i>le silence</i>	- silence
<i>le lit</i>	- bed
<i>facile</i>	- easy
<i>ici</i>	- here
<i>le billet</i>	- ticket
<i>les chips</i>	- crisps
<i>la liste</i>	- list

The sound 'see-on' will always be spelt '-tion' or '-sion':

<i>le natation</i>	- swimming
<i>l'émission</i>	- programme
<i>l'excursion</i>	- outing, trip
<i>la réservation</i>	- booking
<i>la distraction</i>	- amusement
<i>la destination</i>	- destination
<i>l'équitation</i>	- horse-riding
<i>la direction</i>	- direction
<i>les informations</i>	- news

The sound 'sh' is usually spelt 'ch' in French:

<i>le chat</i>	- cat
<i>le chien</i>	- dog
<i>le chocolat</i>	- chocolate
<i>la chose</i>	- thing
<i>se coucher</i>	- to go to bed
<i>le mouchoir</i>	- handkerchief
<i>riche</i>	- rich
<i>le marché</i>	- market

You rarely hear a consonant in French if it is the last letter of a word. If the word you hear does seem to end on a consonant, it often has the letter 'e' after it:

<i>trop</i>	- too	but
<i>le groupe</i>	- group	
<i>le poisson</i>	- fish	but
<i>le téléphone</i>	- telephone	
<i>le placard</i>	- cupboard	but
<i>la promenade</i>	- walk	
<i>le parent</i>	- parent	but
<i>la note</i>	- mark	
<i>le bois</i>	- wood	but
<i>la tasse</i>	- cup	

Producing words in Speaking & Writing

When you are speaking or writing in French you sometimes find yourself 'lost for words'. Think about what you do if this happens to you when you are speaking your own language.

You get your message across either

- *non-verbally* by using your face or hands, perhaps with a few words, to show what you mean,

or

- *verbally* by talking your way round the problem.

You can do exactly the same things in French.

What can I do to get my message across non-verbally?

This method of communication can be useful when you are speaking French abroad, but you should not rely on it in the Speaking Test, because the examiner can only mark what you **say**!

All the same, it is worth knowing what you could do. Here are some ideas.

- Pointing & showing, eg:
 - Showing the size of something with your hands and saying '*Aussi grand que ça*'.
 - Pointing at an object and saying '*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*'
 - Pointing to where it hurts and saying '*Ça me fait mal*'.
- Expression, eg:
 - Showing surprise or anger by tone of voice
 - Showing anger, surprise, fear or pleasure by look on your face
- Mime, eg:
 - You've forgotten how to say 'Can I help you by drying the dishes?' You could mime the action of drying the dishes while saying '*Puis-je t'aider?*'
- Drawing, eg:
 - To show how you get from one point to another, such as from your house to the station.

How can I get my message across verbally, if I don't know all the words?

There **are** ways of doing this, and it's well worth practising them because they are useful in lots of different situations, not just the Speaking Test. All of them are better than saying nothing. Here are some ideas.

- Using a word which refers to a similar thing. For example, if you can't remember how to say
 - 'repas' you could say '*déjeuner*' or '*dîner*'
 - 'verre' you could say '*fasse*'
 - 'pendule' you could say '*montre*'
 - 'fauteil' you could say '*chaise*'
 - 'morceau' you could say '*peu*'

- You could make a list of others which you might find useful.
- Describing something

You could describe the thing you've forgotten the word for. For example, if you can't remember how to say

<i>'arrêt d'autobus'</i>	you could say	<i>'où le bus s'arrête'</i>
<i>'auberge de jeunesse'</i>	you could say	<i>'hôtel pour les jeunes'</i>
<i>'citron'</i>	you could say	<i>'fruit jaune'</i>
<i>'ouvre-bouteille'</i>	you could say	<i>'la chose qui ouvre une bouteille'</i>
<i>'lapin'</i>	you could say	<i>'l'animal aux oreilles longues'</i>

- Using simpler language

If you can't communicate your idea exactly as you want to, try saying it more simply, eg:

If you can't say	<i>'J'attends ta visite avec impatience'</i>
you could say	<i>'Je vais aimer ta visite'</i>

If you can't say	<i>'Je suis arrivé à 5 heures'</i>
you could say	<i>'J'étais ici à 5 heures'</i>

You can also use opposites, eg:

You've forgotten:

<i>'c'est occupé'</i>	so say	<i>'ce n'est pas libre'</i>
<i>'c'est gratuit'</i>	so say	<i>'vous ne payez pas'</i>
<i>'c'est tout près'</i>	so say	<i>'ce n'est pas loin''</i>
<i>'j'ai manqué le train'</i>	so say	<i>'je n'ai pas pris le train'</i>

Is it all right if I just invent a word?

No – please don't! It really isn't a good idea. At best you will probably have a word which doesn't exist and at worst one which means something quite different from what you intended and which leads you into a lot of awkward explanations!

Using a dictionary

REMEMBER – you can use a dictionary for classwork and for coursework, but you **cannot** use it within the examination.

A dictionary is a useful tool, but it isn't a substitute for learning words and learning how to communicate. Like most tools, a dictionary is only as good as the person using it. It's worth the effort to find out how your dictionary works and to practise using it.

Here are some hints to help you get the best out of **your** dictionary.

What do I need to remember when looking up a word?

You will find words much more quickly if you remember that

- a bilingual dictionary comes in two halves – French-English, followed by English-French
- the words are listed in alphabetical order, so you need to know what the alphabetical order is in each language
- the words at the **top** of the page will help you find the word you want
- your knowledge of grammar will help you to find the word you want – for example, it is no use looking up *il a* because verbs are listed as **infinitives** (*avoir*)
- you will find *mange, mangé, mangeaient, mangez, mangent, mangera*, etc. all under the infinitive form of *manger*.
- you will find *grande, grands* and *grandes* under the masculine singular form, *grand*.
- your dictionary will guide you to the right word to look up for irregular forms, eg.

<i>bu</i>	will refer you to	<i>boire</i>
<i>belle</i>	will refer you to	<i>beau</i>
<i>chevaux</i>	will refer you to	<i>cheval</i>
<i>vos</i>	will refer you to	<i>votre</i>

What can help me to understand the dictionary entry now that I've found it?

Quick ways of giving you information are used in dictionaries. You need to know what these are, so that you can find your way through the entry easily and without wasting time.

Remember that

- feminine and plural forms are often given without writing the word out in full, eg.
 - the feminine form of *industriel* is just given as *-le* to show *industrielle*
 - the feminine form of *sportif* is just given as *-ive* to show *sportive*
 - the plural form of *château* is just given as *-x* to show *châteaux*
 - if you look up 'birthday' you might only find 'birth'. Within that section you will see '-day'. This is how the dictionary saves space.
- abbreviations are used to show parts of speech, eg.
porte n.f. - this tells you that it is a feminine noun, so you might need to put *une* or *la* in front of it.