

French Words in English - Worksheet



Nearly 30% of all English words come directly or indirectly from French. English speakers will typically know at least 1500 French words without needing to study the language, though they may not recognise the original pronunciation.

The Normans

In 1066 the Normans invaded England. They introduced a legal and administrative system using a Norman French dialect, Anglo Norman. Over time around 10,000 French words (typically with Latin roots) came into common usage in England. Of these 7,000 French words survive in modern English.

Sometimes the new Anglo-Norman words exist alongside existing Anglo-Saxon ones: *beef* (from French *boeuf*) and *cow* for example. The Norman word is often considered more formal as in *sweat* (Anglo-Saxon) and *perspire* (Norman).

The Normans also had an enormous impact in key areas of vocabulary: particularly **politics** (*coup d'état*), **legal language** (*jury, judge, justice, plaintiff, verdict*) and diplomacy (*chargé d'affaires*). Norman words are typically used to describe **military terms** (*battle, navy, march, enemy*), **the state** (*parliament, noble*) and **the Church** (*miracle, sermon, virgin, saint*).

Eventually Anglo Norman declined and a new form, Middle English, evolved. But French remained the language of court and learning. Anglo-Saxon words remained in everyday use but many lost their social status.

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Quick Check

1. What percentage of English words originate from French?
 2. How many French words does the average person know?
 3. From which French word does the English word *beef* originate?
 4. Middle English began to replace Anglo French
 5. Anglo Saxon words disappeared from English.
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Pronunciation & Social Status

French influence on English words can also be seen in pronunciation. One example is the diphthong (long 'o' sound) *boy*, for example. Or the 'th' sound in *thin/shin*.

In English, French words generally retain their original pronunciation: *ballet*, for example, has a silent 't' rather than a sounded one as in Spanish. Some common nouns have been completely anglicised e.g. the hard 's' in *Paris*.

How an English speaker pronounces French words involves tricky social *etiquette*. Fowler, in his [Modern English Usage](#) (1926) talks about the 'vulgarity' of the excessive use of French words and phrases - an attitude summed up in the old joke: *Pretentious? Moi?*

Sometimes a French word will sound misleadingly *chic* in English. *Bistro* for example, has romantic French associations but the Russian origin is "bystro" meaning "fast". Therefore, your local Burger King is technically a "bistro".

There are around 1,700 French English cognates (words with shared origins). Some capture a precise meaning not available in English. Examples include *fiancé*, *genre*

Quick Check: True or False?

6. French words always retain their original pronunciation.
7. Fowler believed that some English speakers used too many French words.
8. Cognates are words with the same spelling but different origins.

[Cognates worksheet](#)