

French For Gringos Lesson 2 Courtesy Essentials 2026 10 04

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Maya: Bonjour, and welcome back to French for Gringos. I'm Maya.

Devon: And I'm Devon. Yesterday you learned to say hello like a pro. Today we're learning the magic words: how to be polite in French. Because in France, politeness isn't decoration. It's the whole engine.

Maya: First and most important: s'il vous plaît, seel voo pleh. That means please. Tip: it looks scary but it's just three gentle syllables. Seel, like the animal. Voo. Then pleh, with a soft eh. Seel voo pleh. You'll say it after every single request.

Devon: Next: merci, mehr-see. Thank you. Tip: don't say it like the English word mercy. It's mehr, with a soft French r in the throat, then see. Mehr-see. Short and sweet.

Maya: When someone thanks you, you answer de rien, duh ree-ah(n). That means you're welcome, literally "of nothing." Tip: nasal vowel at the end, ree-ah(n). Let it hum through the nose, no hard n.

Devon: Now for the two ways to say sorry and excuse me. First: pardon, pahr-doh(n). Tip: that o is a nasal vowel, pahr-doh(n). Use it when you bump into someone, or when you didn't hear what they said and need them to repeat.

Maya: Second: excusez-moi, eks-kew-zay mwah. Excuse me. Tip: eks, then kew, then zay, and mwah, like blowing a kiss. It's what you say when you need to get past someone or grab a waiter's attention.

Devon: And a bonus one you'll definitely need: à vos souhaits, ah voh sweh. Bless you, said after someone sneezes. Tip: ah, then voh, then sweh, rhymes with the French word for hair, which is exactly what it sounds like. In Québec they'll also just say this, so it works everywhere.

Maya: Let's demo. Scene: a bakery in Lyon. I'm the customer, Devon's behind the counter.

Devon: Well, boh(n)-zhoor, welcome in!

Maya: Boh(n)-zhoor! Un croissant, seel voo pleh.

Devon: Voilà That will be three euros.

Maya: Mehr-see!

Devon: Duh ree-ah(n), of course! Ekh-skew-zay mwah, I need to help this other customer.

Maya: Oh, pahr-doh(n), no worries!

Devon: Cultural note for today: France has service compris, meaning the tip is already included in your bill at restaurants. Nobody expects twenty percent. A couple of coins for great service is plenty. But here's the real currency: always say merci, with eye contact. That tiny word buys you more goodwill than any tip.

Maya: Recap drill. Say them back to us. One: merci, mehr-see, thank you.

Devon: Two: de rien, duh ree-ah(n), you're welcome.

Maya: Three: excusez-moi, eks-kew-zay mwah, excuse me. You are now officially polite in