

# False friends

- achever** - not to achieve but to finish, complete as in *Il vient d'achever son service militaire* - He's just finished his military service. The English to achieve can be translated by *atteindre, réaliser, accomplir*.
- actuel(lement)** - not actual(ly) but current(ly): *Elle est actuellement en Suisse* - She's currently in Switzerland. The English actually is usually translated by *en fait*.
- agenda (m)** - not an agenda in a meeting (*ordre du jour*) but a diary.
- amateur (m)** - although as in English this can have the meaning of non-professional, it more commonly means enthusiast (as in *un amateur de jazz* - a jazz lover).
- apprécier** - not just appreciate but also to estimate or assess : *apprécier les conséquences* - to assess the consequences.
- assister / assistance** - when used with à means to be present at, as in *Il n'a pas assisté à la réunion* - He wasn't present at the meeting. Note also that assistance can mean audience as well as assistance.
- assumer** - not to assume (= supposer) but to take on (responsibility) or accept (a situation).
- assurance (f)** - means insurance as well as assurance.  
*attendance*
- balancer** - not to balance (= équilibrer, se tenir en équilibre) but to sway.  
*assister à* - to attend a course
- blâmer** - not to blame (= reprocher qch à qn / en vouloir à qn) but to criticize.
- caméra** - not a camera for taking photos (= un appareil photo) but a film / TV camera.
- casserole (m)** - not a casserole (= un ragoût) but a saucepan.
- caution (f)** - not caution (= prudence, circonspection or avertissement) but deposit, security or bail.
- cave (m)** - not a cave (= une grotte) but a cellar.
- change** - The English change is most commonly translated by *un changement*: *un changement de direction* = a change of direction. The English change in the sense of loose change = *la monnaie*, whilst the French change (m) means foreign currency as in *bureau de change*.
- chauffeur (m)** - not just an English chauffeur, but any kind of professional driver e.g. *un chauffeur de taxi* - a taxi driver.

- chips (mpl)** - not *chips* (= *frites* - *tpl*) but *crisps*. The English *chip* in the computer sense is *une puce*.
- cohérent** - more commonly *consistent* as in *une position cohérente* - *a consistent position*. The sentence *He was barely coherent* = *On avait peine à le comprendre*.
- collège (m)** - not *college* as in *university* but a *secondary school* up to the age of 16.
- comédien(ne) (m)** - not *comedien* (= *comique*) but *actor*.
- commande (f)** - not *command* (= *ordre*) but *order* in the commercial or restaurant sense. *Une télécommande* is a *remote-control*.
- compléter** - more commonly means *to supplement* or *complement* rather than *to complete* (= *terminer, achever*).
- conception (f), concevoir** - in the commercial sense means *design, to design* rather than *conceive, conception*.
- conducteur (m)** - not the *conductor* of a bus (= *contrôleur*) or an orchestra (*chef d'orchestre*) but a *driver*.
- conférence** - not a *conference* (= *un congrès, une réunion*) but a *lecture* or *speech*.
- conforter** - not *to comfort* (= *réconforter*) but *to support, strengthen*.
- contrôler** - more commonly means *to check* (as in *contrôler les billets / passeports*). The English *to control* is most often translated by *dominer, maîtriser* etc.
- courage (m)** - not just *courage* but also *energy*. The expression *bon courage* means variously *good luck, cheer up* or other positive wishes depending on the context.
- cours (m)** - means an individual *class* as well as a *course*. A course in a school is *un programme* and in a university is *un cursus*.
- décevoir, deception** - not *to deceive* (= *tromper*) but *to disappoint*. Note also the noun *déception* (f) meaning not *deception* (= *une tromperie*) but *disappointment*.
- dégoûter** - although can mean *to disgust*, is often translated by the milder *to put off*: *Ne te laisse pas dégoûter par la couleur* - *Don't let the colour put you off*.
- délai (m)** - not *delay* (= *retard*) but a *timeperiod* for doing something: *Tu as un délai de 30 jours pour payer* - *You have 30 days in which to pay*. Note also the expression *dans les meilleurs délais* - *as soon as possible*.

- demander** - not to demand (= exiger) but to ask for.
- député (m)** - not deputy (= un adjoint) but a member of the Assemblée Nationale (the French Parliament).
- dessin** - not design (= la conception) but a drawing. Un dessein = a project, plan.
- déstiné** - often means to be aimed at, intended for. For example, Des mesures destinées à réduire le taux de chômage = Measures aimed at reducing unemployment
- détail (m)** - means not only detail but also retail (as in le prix de détail - retail price). Note also un détaillant - a retailer (as opposed to un grossiste - wholesaler) and acheter au détail - to buy retail (as opposed to acheter en gros - to buy wholesale).
- détenir** - not to detain (= retenir, placer en détention) but to possess.
- disposer de** - not to dispose of (= se débarrasser de) but to have (at your disposal).
- dossier (m)** - not just file or dossier, but in a media context commonly used to mean issue, affair. Le dossier Elf - The Elf affair.
- éditeur (m)** - not editor (= rédacteur) but publisher.
- effectif (m)** - none of the meaning of the adjective effective (= efficace) but workforce (or in an educational context number of students).
- énergétique** - not energetic as used to describe a person (= énergique) but relating to energy as a resource: les ressources énergétique - energy resources.
- engin (m)** - not engine (= un moteur) but device: un engin de fermeture - a locking device.
- enquête (f)** - much broader meaning than inquest, including inquiry, investigation and survey.
- équipement (m)** - not only equipment (more commonly = matériel) but facilities: équipements sportifs - sports facilities.
- éventuel(lement)** - not eventual(ly) (= finalement) but possible / possibly.
- exercice (m)** - not just exercise but in a business context can also mean financial year.
- expérience (f) / expérimenté** - not just experience but can also mean experiment. By contrast, expérimenté means experienced. The verb to experience is most commonly translated by connaître or, for an emotion, éprouver.

**exploiter** - generally used with the more neutral sense of *to run, operate* rather than the pejorative *to exploit*: *exploiter un réseau* - *to operate a network*. The noun *un exploitant* is commonly translated as *operator*, but can be more specific according to the context, e.g. *un exploitant agricole* - *a farmer*.

**faculté (f)** - generally means *university* rather than *faculty*. Often shortened to *fac*: *elle est en fac* - *she's at university*.

**faillir** - not to fail (= *échouer, rater*) but *to nearly to something*: *J'ai failli tomber* - *I nearly fell over*.

**figure (f)** - not *figure* (= *un personnage* in the sense of *person*, *un chiffre* in the sense of *number* and *la ligne* in the sense of *body shape*) but *face*.

**forfait (m)** - not a *forfeit* in a game (= *un gage*) but something paid at a fixed rate, especially a *package holiday*.

**formulaire (m)** - not a *formula* (= *une formule*) but a *form*, as in *remplir un formulaire* - *to fill in a form*.

**global** - not so much *global* as *total* or *overall*, as in *croissance globale* - *overall growth*.

**grappe (f)** - not *grape* (= *une raisin*) but a *bunch of grapes*.

**gratuité (f)** - not a *gratuity* (= *un pourboire*) but the noun from *gratuit* meaning *free* or *gratuitous*. Thus *la gratuité de l'enseignement* means *free education*.

**grief (m)** - not *grief* (= *la douleur, le chagrin*) but a *grievance*.

**humeur (m)** - not *humour* (= *humour*) but *mood* or *temperament*.

**huile (f)** - *oil* that is *edible* and not that which can be burned (= *le pétrole*).

**ignorer** - although can mean *to ignore*, most commonly means *not to know* e.g. *J'ignore les détails* - *I don't know the details*.

**impliquer** - not just *to implicate* but also more neutrally *to involve* : *se sentir impliqué* - *to feel involved*.

**important** - most commonly *important*, but in a numerical context can mean *significant* or *considerable*: *un nombre important de candidats* - *a considerable number of candidates*; *une hausse importante* - *a significant increase*.

**impression (une)** - not only *impression* but also *printing*. *Lancer une impression* - *to launch a print-out*.

**inciter** - usually means to encourage / urge rather than to incite. *Le journal a incité le gouvernement d'investir dans l'éducation - The paper encouraged the government to invest more in education.*

**ingénieur (m)** - broader meaning than *engineer*, including most technical and commercial domains.

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**inhabitable** - not *inhabitable* but *uninhabitable*.

**injure (f)** - not an *injury* (= *une blessure*) but an *insult*.

**intéressant** - in the context of money can mean *attractive*: *Il le vend à un prix intéressant - He's selling it at an attractive price.*

**interroger** - broader meaning than to *interrogate*, including to *question* or to *put questions to*: *Les journalistes ont interrogé le président sur l'Europe - The journalists questioned the President on Europe.*

**intervention (f)** - not only *intervention* but also a *surgical operation* and a *speech* or *lecture*.

**inutile** - not just *useless*, but also *unnecessary*: *Inutile de dire qu'il n'y est pas rentré - Needless to say, he didn't go back.*

**isolation (f)** - not *isolation* (= *isolement*) but *insulation*.

**issue (m)** - not an *issue* (= *question, dossier*) but an *exit, solution* or *outcome*.

**joindre** - not to *join* in the sense of an organization (= *devenir member de, adhérer à, s'inscrire à* or *entrer*), but to *get hold of (someone)*, to *enclose* or to *attach together*.

**large** - not *large* (= *grand*) but *wide*.

**lecture (f)** - not a *lecture* in the academic sense (= *une conférence* if a public talk, *un cours magistral* if part of a series of academic lectures) but the act of *reading*.

**libéralisme (m)** - just as commonly refers to *economic liberalism* (i.e. right-of-centre) as to *social liberalism* (i.e. left-of-centre).

**librairie (f)** - not a *library* (= *une bibliothèque*) but a *bookshop*.

**licence (m)** - not a *licence* (= *un permis*) but a three-year bachelor's degree.

**local (m)** - when used as a noun means *premises*.

**location** (f) - not *location* (= *emplacement* if referring to site or *localisation* if referring to act of locating).

**lunatique** - not *mad* but *moody, changeable*.

**matériel** (m) - not *material* (= *du tissu, de l'étoffe* - f - for making clothes etc., or *la matière* for stories etc.) but *equipment*. In a computer context *matériel* means *hardware*, the opposite of *le logiciel* (= *software*).

**militant** (m) - not a *militant* (= *un agitateur*) but *an activist*.

**mobile** (m) - when used as a noun means *motive*: *le mobile du crime* - *the motive for the crime*.

**moteur** (m) - not just a *motor* but also a *car engine*.

**muter, mutation** (f) - not just *mutate, mutation* in the biological sense but more commonly *transfer*: *être muté à une filiale* - *to be transferred to a subsidiary*.

**nouvelle** (f) - in the literary sense not *novel* but *short story*.

**occasion** (f) - not just an *occasion* but also an *opportunity*.

**offre** (f) / **offrir** - not just an *offer* but also *supply* in the commercial sense: *l'offre et la demande* - *supply and demand*. *Offrir* means not only *to offer* but also *to buy*: *Je te l'offre* - *I'll buy it for you*.

**onéreux** - not *onerous* (= *lourd*) but *expensive*.

**parc** (m) - not just *park* but also in a commercial sense *total number of* or *stock*.

**part** (f) - not a *part* (= *une partie* in general or *un rôle* in a play) but a *share*: *Une part de marché* - *a market share*.

**passer** - in the expression *passer un examen* means *to take an exam*, not *to pass an exam* (= *réussir un examen*).

**pension** (f) - not just *pension* but also *boarding house, boarding school* and *board* in general: *pension complète* - *full board*.

**percevoir** - not just *perceive* but also *to receive money*: *percevoir des droits d'auteur* - *to receive royalties*. *Un percepteur* is a *tax inspector*.

**pétrole** (m) - not *petrol* (= *de l'essence*) but *oil* that can be made into fuel etc. *L'huile* is *edible oil*.

**photographe** (m) - not *photograph* (= *une photographie*) but *a photographer*.

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- phrase (f)** - not a phrase (= *une expression, une locution*) but a *sentence*.
- plan (m)** - not *plan* (= *un projet, dessein*) but a *map* of a town, transport system etc.
- politique (m)** - not just *politics* but also a *policy*: *la politique étrangère* - *foreign policy*.
- préjudice (m)** - not *préjudice* (= *des préjugés*) but *harm*. *Porter préjudice à* - *To cause harm to*.
- président (m)** - often translated by *chairman / chairwoman* rather than *president*: *Le président d'une entreprise* - *the chairman of a company*.
- prétendre** - not to *pretend* (= *faire comme si / faire semblant de faire*) but to *claim*: *Il prétend tout ignorer* - *He pretends not to know anything*.
- procès (m)** - not a *process* (= *un processus*) but a *trial*.
- prune (f)** - not a *prune* (= *un pruneau*) but a *plum*.
- raisin (m)** - not a *raisin* (= *un raisin sec*) but a *grape*.
- réaliser** - the use of this verb to mean *to realise* in the sense of *to become aware of* is not fully accepted. It is preferable to use *se rendre compte de qch*.
- reporter** - not to *report* (= *signaler, faire le compte rendu de*) but to *postpone*.
- rude** - not *rude* (= *impoli*) but *rough*.
- sensible** - not *sensible* (= *raisonnable, sensé*) but *sensitive*.
- sérieux** - can mean *reliable* or *conscientious* as well as *serious*: *C'est une compagnie très sérieuse* - *It's a very reliable company*.
- service (m)** - in addition to *service* can also mean *favour* (as in *Tu peux me rendre un service?* - *Can you do me a favour?*) and *department* (as in *le service du personnel* - *personnel department*).
- 2-5 **sinistre (m)** - when used as a noun means variously a *disaster*, an *accident* or *damage*.
- société (f) / social** - in a commercial sense not a *society* (= *une association*) but a *company*.
- sommaire (m)** - not a *summary* (= *un résumé*) but a *table of contents*.

**supporter** - only means *to support* in the sense of *to bear the weight of* or *to follow a sports team*.  
Otherwise means *to put up with*. *To support* in the sense of *to provide moral backing for* is generally translated by *soutenir*.

**susceptible** - not *susceptible* (= *sensible*) but *touchy*. Also the expression *être susceptible de* - to be likely to.

**sympathique** - not *sympathique* (= *compatissant*) but *friendly, pleasant*.

**terrible** - not only *terrible* but in some contexts the opposite i.e. *great* : *Il n'est pas terrible ce film*  
- *It's not great this film*.

**tissu (m)** - not a *tissue* (= *un kleenex*) but *material, fabric*.

**user** - not *to use* (= *utiliser*) but *to wear out*.

**veste (f)** - not a *vest* (= *un maillot*) but a *jacket*.



## **VOUS**

**Le « vous » est le rein de la langue parlée.**

**Il filtre la mauvaise humeur, la colère, le mépris,  
l'insulte facile et la vulgarité.**

**Le vouvoiement constitue un obstacle de taille  
à l'insolence et installe une distance courtoise.**

*→ insolent*

**L .Masson**

**( Du Tic au Tac )**