

Coffee Break **French**

Season 1, Lesson 1

Lesson notes



CoffeeBreak
French

Ça va bien, merci

Asking "how are you?"

Welcome to Coffee Break French, the course aimed at independent learners of French which will introduce you to the French language in easy steps. These programme notes will help you get more out of each episode by explaining how words are written and giving you more information about each phrase along with some bonus vocabulary where appropriate. These notes accompany free audio lessons which you can download from the Radio Lingua website.



Language notes

oui

yes

The French word for 'yes' is pronounced like Scottish "wee".

non

no

Remember to get the nasal sound here - if it helps, hold your nose!

ça va?

how are you?

Just as in English, there are many ways of asking someone in French how they're feeling. This is the simplest way and it literally means "that's going?", as in "things are going well?" Note also that the word **ça** has a diacritic mark on the 'c'. It's like a very small comma or number 5 hanging down from the 'c'. It's called a "**cedilla**" and it makes the 'c' sound like an 's'. If there was no cedilla in the word **ça** it would sound like "**ca**-" in "car".

ça va

"things are fine"

Note that you can answer the question **ça va?** by saying **ça va**. The difference is that with the question you raise your voice towards the end of the sentence, and with the statement there's no change in intonation.

bien

well

Note the nasal sound in the recording.

ça va bien

things are going well

Note that **bien** means "well" as opposed to "good". If you learn the word as meaning "well" it should save you some confusion later!

merci

thank you

Take care with the French 'r' sound. It's like a guttural, rolled 'r', quite difficult to produce for non-native speakers.

ça va bien, merci

things are going well, thanks; "I'm fine, thanks"

et toi?

and you?; what about you?

Toi is the informal form of "you" in this phrase. There is a formal form which we'll cover in future episodes.

très

very

Again, watch the French 'r' in this word.

ça va très bien

things are going very well

ça va très bien, merci

things are going very well, thank you

excellent

excellent

Although the word looks identical to the English word, it's pronounced in French.

ça ne va pas

things aren't going well

To make something negative in French you put **ne ... pas** round the verb. There will be further discussion of this in future episodes.

je suis en forme

I'm feeling good; I'm on form

Je suis means "I am" and is a phrase we'll be coming back to many times. **En forme** literally means "on form".

je suis fatigué

I'm tired (masculine)

The word **fatigué** comes from the same root as the English word "fatigue", meaning "tiredness".

je suis fatiguée

I'm tired (feminine)

There is a feminine form of **fatigué** which has an extra 'e' on the end. This makes no difference to the pronunciation, but it's vital to include the extra 'e' when you're writing in French.

Spotlight

ç é è

We mentioned earlier that French uses a cedilla to make a 'c' sound like an 's', as in the word **ça**. French also uses other accents, or "diacritic marks". In this lesson we've come across an "acute accent", as in **fatigué** and what's called a "grave accent", in the word **très**. Both these accents affect how a word is pronounced: **é** ("e acute") results in a sound something like the "ay" in "hay", and **è** ("e grave") normally sounds like the "e" in "egg".

Bonus Vocabulary

Where appropriate we'll include some bonus vocabulary which will help to extend the range of language covered in each lesson.

comment ça va?

how are things?

This is the 'full' version of the shortened phrase **ça va?**

ça roule?

how's it going?

A very colloquial way of asking "how are things?" This phrase should be kept for close friends only and tends to be used more among young people.

génial

great

You're more likely to say this as a one-word answer, rather than say **ça va génial** which sounds a little strange.

comme ci, comme ça

so so

In between *ça va bien* and *ça ne va pas*.

je ne suis pas en forme

I'm not feeling good; I'm not on form

The negative version of **je suis en forme**: note the **ne ... pas** going round the verb (**suis**).

bof

almost untranslatable!

This is a very French expression and virtually always is accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders and/or raised eyebrows. If you ask someone **ça va** and they reply **bof** then basically it means things aren't great but they've accepted that things are never that great anyway...



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