

FRENCH: THE MOST PRACTICAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE

While any language will be useful for some jobs or for some regions, French is the only foreign language that can be useful throughout the world as well as in the U.S. French as a foreign language is the second most frequently taught language in the world after English. The International Organization of Francophonie has 51 member states and governments. Of these, 28 countries have French as an official language. French is the only language other than English spoken on five continents. French and English are the only two global languages.

When deciding on a foreign language for work or school, consider that French is the language that will give you the most choices later on in your studies or your career.

French, along with English, is the official working language of

- the United Nations
- UNESCO
- NATO
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- the International Labor Bureau
- the International Olympic Committee
- the 31-member Council of Europe
- the European Community
- the Universal Postal Union
- the International Red Cross
- Union of International Associations (UIA)

French is the dominant working language at

- the European Court of Justice
- the European Tribunal of First Instance
- the European Court of Auditors in Luxembourg.
- the Press Room at the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium

One example of the importance of French can be seen in a recent listing of international jobs (5/13/03) distributed by the U.S. State Department: 185 required or preferred French, 124 a UN language (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish), 39 Spanish, 19 Arabic, 10 Russian, 6 Portuguese, 5 German, 5 Chinese.

Of the various types of professional positions for which international organizations recruit, five required French, two Spanish, one Portuguese, and one Arabic, according to the fact sheet released by the UN Employment Information and Assistance Unit Bureau of International Organization Affairs, U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2000.

The Economics of French and France

- In 2000, the U.S. exported more to

countries having French as a national language than to countries having any other foreign language. Exports to Canada alone in that year were greater than the combined exports to all countries south of the U.S.

- French is the foreign language spoken by our largest trading partner (Canada).
- The province of Quebec alone is the fifth largest trading partner of the U.S. with over \$104 billion in trade in 2000.
- Between 1995 and 2001 exports from the U.S. to France increased by 57%; imports from France went up 72%.
- The U.S. and France share many trade similarities, particularly their global standing as the world's top two exporters in three very important sectors: defense products, agricultural goods, and services. Franco-American trade is also remarkable for its symmetry, as six of the top ten exports are the same each way.
- France has the fourth largest economy in the world after the U.S., Japan, and Germany.
- France is the second largest exporter of agricultural products in the world after the U.S.
- In recent years, the U.S. has been the largest direct investor in France, and France has been one of the three largest investors in the U.S.
- France is the fourth largest destination of foreign investments in the world.
- French companies employ approximately 650,000 Americans. Among foreign countries doing business in the U.S., France employs the third largest number of Americans.
- French is one of the languages spoken in the U.S.: 1.9 million Americans speak French in the home. (2000 U.S. Census)
- Overall, the French export more per capita than the Japanese and more than twice as much as the Americans. France is overall, the fourth largest exporting nation of the world.
- France is the world's leader in the production of luxury goods.
- More tourists visit France than any other country in the world.

Science and Technology

- Seven of France's top ten exports to the U.S. are industrial or high technology products.
- France is the fourth largest producer of automobiles in the world (Renault, Peugeot, Citroën) and the third

largest exporter. (All Mack trucks are manufactured by Renault.)

- France is fourth in research among countries of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (after Japan, Germany, and the U.S.).
- France is a major world research center in the field of high energy physics.
- The French are a world leader in medical research: the AIDS virus was first isolated by French doctors.
- The French are a leader in medical genetics (the Human Genome Project is located in Paris).
- The French are the world's third manufacturers of electronics equipment.
- The French are European leaders in aerospace (Aérospatiale, Ariane-space, Airbus).
- Most commercial satellites are put into space on French Ariane rockets.
- The fastest train (TGV) is French.
- The fastest commercial airplane (Concorde) was French (built in collaboration with British Aerospace).
- France is the world's third military power (after the U.S. and Russia) and has the world's second largest defense industry (ie. Exocet missiles, radar technology.)
- France is the world's second largest builder and exporter of civilian and military aircraft and helicopters (Airbus is the world's second largest fleet of commercial airliners, and many of the U.S. Coast Guard helicopters are made by Aérospatiale in Toulouse.)
- France has one of the most advanced systems of telecommunications in the world. Fiber optics were invented in France.
- France is the world's largest manufacturer of television sets (HDTV was invented in France).

Importance of French in school and work

Historically France and the French language have had an enormous influence over American society. France was the U.S.' first ally. French thought played a dominant role among the founders of the U.S. in the 18th century, and it continues to shape America today through the influence of such intellectual currents as post-structuralism and post-modernism. In the humanities and the social sciences, many of the most important writings have come from France. Students and researchers who know French have access to these works for several years before they are

translated into English. Many significant works are never translated and remain accessible only to those who know the language. In addition, most graduate schools require knowledge of at least one foreign language, and French remains the most commonly used language after English.

When employers and universities look at applicants, they do not start looking at the bottom of the list to see who has done only the minimal amount of requirements necessary or taken the easiest route available, they start at the top of the list and look for those students who have risen above the rest. High school students should consider studying at least four years of a foreign language, College students should seek to earn a minor in French or have French as a primary or secondary major. With French they have access to the most widely spoken foreign language in the world after English, and they become familiar with a culture that significantly influences our own. The French economy is one of the strongest in the world and is increasingly a leader in technological innovation. In sum, French is the language of the future.

Please visit the Web version of this article at [www.fll.vt.edu/french/why_french.html], as this information is updated frequently.

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Note: Information for this article comes from a variety of sources including "U.S. Government Country Commercial Guide FY 2002: France," Info-France USA, The Importance of the French Language/ L'Importance de la langue française by Alvord G. Branan, Co-Director, Center for International Business Education and Research San Diego State University, and Bernard Moreau, *Attaché Linguistique, Consulat général de France*, San Francisco, CA. Special thanks to Dr. Eric DuPlessis of Radford University who also contributed information.