

Abbreviation (French)	Full name (French)	Meaning (English)	Abbreviation (French)	Full name (French)	Meaning (English)
adj	adjectif	adjective	nm n.masc	nom masculin	masculine noun
adv	adverbe	adverb	plur. pl.	pluriel	plural
conj	conjonction	conjunction, linking word	pr pron.	pronom	pronoun
F, fem.	féminin	feminine	prep	préposition	preposition
fam	familier	informal, colloquial	qch qqch	quelque chose	something
fig	figuré	figurative	qn qqn	quelqu'un	someone
interj	interjection	interjection	sing.	singulier	singular
litt	littéraire	literary	sout.	soutenu	formal, elevated
m masc.	masculin	masculine	v vb	verbe	verb
n	nom	noun	vi v.intr	verbe intransitif	intransitive verb
nf n.fem	nom féminin	feminine noun	vtr v.trans	verbe transitif	transitive verb

### How can you get more information?

Ask your child's teacher, they will have a list of the recommended resources each year.

### Canadian Parents for French

CPF was founded in 1977 by parents who wanted to ensure that children would have the opportunity to become bilingual in the Canadian school system. You will find resources, games and activities for your child and links to other CPF websites nationwide on the National CPF website. Membership in CPF (\$25 annually) helps provide opportunities for children to practice French as well as support advocacy activities. [pei.cpf.ca](http://pei.cpf.ca) [info@cpfpei.pe.ca](mailto:info@cpfpei.pe.ca)

# Resource tools for French Immersion students

*How to get the perfect  
translation*

CPF Executive  
CANADIAN PARENTS FOR FRENCH PEI

## Bilingual dictionaries are essential tools for the second language learner. (Bigger is better)

Many words don't translate directly between languages. In other cases, a word can have several different meanings, and choosing the wrong one can cause real confusion.

Better dictionaries will provide all the possibilities. Whether you're using the dictionary to look up something in your child's homework, or your child is using it because he's stuck for a French word, it's always important to read through the entire entry!

A good dictionary gives more than just the translation. You will find the part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.), gender (masculin, féminin), examples of usage, and perhaps even some history of the word. It will also provide a phonetic spelling of each word and, at the beginning, a guide to the symbols being used.

Can't find a word? It might be because:

- you're looking up the article (le, la, un, une—which mean the or a/an)
- you're looking on the wrong side of the dictionary
- you've spelled the word incorrectly
- it's a conjugated verb.

Students in French immersion don't translate: they think and work in French. Their primary reference should be an all-French dictionary, with the French-English dictionary as a backup. Talk to your child's teacher about an appropriate dictionary for his grade level.

Using them correctly requires more than just looking up a word in one language and picking the first translation you see.

Similar to the English language, French words may have more than one possibility including *synonyms*, *varying registers* and *different parts of speech*.

Bilingual dictionaries use specialized terms and abbreviations, a *phonetic alphabet* to indicate pronunciation, and other techniques to provide a great deal of information in a limited amount of space.

### Example

Look up the French word livre. There are two quite different translations. It's a masculine noun meaning "book, register, or journal." It's also a feminine noun meaning "pound" (the measure of weight). Now look up the English word pound to see if you can find the correct equivalents for (a) 16 ounces, (b) hit or beat, and (c) an enclosed place for keeping animals or automobiles.

**Look up unmodified words:** many words have more than one form: nouns can be singular or plural (sometimes masculine or feminine), adjectives can be comparative and superlative, and verbs can be conjugated into different tenses and so on.

Dictionaries list the uninflected word: the singular noun, the basic adjective (in French, this means the singular, masculine form, while in English it means the non-comparative, no superlative form) and the infinitive of the verb.

When you wonder what tu sonnes eans, you have to consider that sonnes is a verb conjugation, so the infinitive is probably sonner, sonnier or sonre look those up to learn that sonner means "to ring".

Likewise, reflexive verbs such as s'asseoir and se souvenir are listed under the verb, asseoir and souvenir, not the reflexive pronoun se- otherwise that entry would run to hundreds of pages.

**Find the important words:** When you first look up an expression, there are two possibilities: you might find it in the entry for the first word of the expression, but more likely it will be listed in the entry of the most important word in the expression.

**Try it:** pick a few expressions and look up the different words to get a feel for how your dictionary works to get a feel for how your dictionary tends to list them.

**Keep it in context:** Even after you know which word to look up, you still have to work to do both. French and English have a lot of homonyms, or words that look alike but have more than one meaning



### Example

**Example:** The expression "du coup" is listed under coup rather than du. Sometimes there are two important words in an expression, the entry for one will cross-reference the other. In looking up the expression "tomber dans les pommes", you start by looking up tomber, where I found a hyperlink to pomme, when I looked up pomme, you find that the expression translates as "to faint/pass out".

### Example

You may not find a dictionary entry for the word serveuse, so need to replace the feminine ending- euse with the masculine- eur, and then when you look up serveur, you'll find it means "waiter" so serveuse means "waitress".

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**Making up a list of words:** This isn't always a good idea, if you don't look them up right away, you will have no context to fit them into. You're better off looking up the words as you go, or at the very least write down the whole sentence that the word appears in so you know what context they are used in.

**Automatic translators:** Software and websites are getting better but remember they are not able to consider context in order to decide which meaning is most appropriate.

**Know your parts of speech:** Some homonyms can even be two different parts of speech. The English word "produce" for example can be a verb (they produce a lot of cars) or a noun (they have the best produce). When you look up the word "produce" you'll see at least two French translations: the French verb is produire and the noun is produits.

**Fact:** if you do not pay attention to the part of speech of the word you want to translate, you may end up with a big grammatical mistake in whatever you're writing.

**Gender:** remember to pay attention to French gender, many words have different meanings depending on whether they are masculine or feminine (let's call them dual gender nouns). So when you're looking up a French word be sure you're looking at the entry for that gender. When looking up an English noun, pay extra attention to the gender it gives for the French translation.

### Understand your dictionary's shortcuts:

The first dozen or so pages in the front of your dictionary hold a lot of really important information! We're not talking about things like the introduction, forewords and prefaces but rather the explanation of conventions used throughout the dictionary. In order for dictionaries to save space, dictionaries use all kinds of symbols, which most dictionaries use to show pronunciation. Your dictionary will also have a list of abbreviations that it uses throughout such as adj (adjective) arg (argot), Belg (belgicism) and so on.

**Abbreviations and symbols:** These all provide important information about how, when and why to use any given word. If you're given a choice of two terms and one is old fashioned, you probably want to choose the other. If it is slang, you shouldn't use it in a professional setting. If it is a Canadian term, a Belgian might not understand it. (see page 7)

### Example

The English word "blue" literally refers to a color- its French equivalent is bleu. But "blue" can also be used figuratively to indicate sadness, as in "to feel blue" which is equivalent to "avoir le cafard: if you were to translate "to feel blue" literally you'd end up with the nonsensical "se sentir bleu". The same rules apply when we are translating French to English.

**Pay attention to figurative language and idioms:** Most words and expressions have two meanings: a literal meaning and a figurative one. It is easy to translate literal language but not so much figurative terms.

**Try it in reverse:** Once you have found your translation (After considering context and parts of speech) it is still a good idea to try to verify that you've chosen the best word. A quick and easy way to check is with a reverse look-up, which simply means looking up the word in the new language to see what translations it offers in the original language.

**Compare definitions:** Another good technique for double checking your translation is to compare dictionary definitions. Look up the English word in your monolingual English dictionary and the French in your monolingual dictionary and see whether the definitions are equivalent.

**Go native:** the best way to find out whether your bilingual dictionary gave the right translation is to ask a native speaker. Dictionaries make generalizations, get outdated, and even make a few mistakes, but native speakers evolve with their language - they know the slang and whether this term is too formal or that one is a little rude, and especially when a word "doesn't sound quite right" or "just can't be used like that".

**A la francais forum:** If you don't know any native French speakers don't despair, [www.French.about.com/has](http://www.French.about.com/has) a forum/blog with native speakers who are more than willing to answer any of your questions, just post a note in the forum.

### Top bilingual French dictionaries:

*When buying a French dictionary, you need to consider your language proficiency and what you'll be using the dictionary for. It is also important to keep in mind that bilingual dictionaries are great tools, but can have discrepancies.*

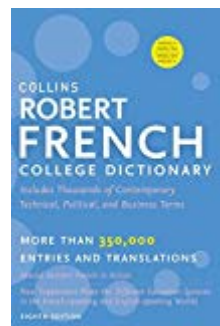
### Collins Robert unabridged dictionary

This is the largest and best French-English dictionary with more than 2,000 pages.

### Examples

If you look up purple, the dictionary might offer violet and pourpre as the French translation. When you look these two words up in the French-English dictionary you'll find that violet means purple while pourpre means crimon or red-violet.

The definition of hunger in the American Heritage dictionary says a strong desire or need for food. Whereas the grand Robert dictionary says for faim, sensation qui normalement, accompagne le besoin de manger. These two definitions say pretty much the same thing, which means that "hunger and faim are the same thing.



Entries include slang, regionalisms and expressions. There is also a useful section on “language in use” with vocabulary and expressions grouped by categories.

### **HaperCollins Robert French College Dictionary**

Abridged version of the above, suitable for advanced students.

### **Larousse Concise French-English dictionary**

A paperback dictionary with 100,000 entries including slang, culture, and more.

Intermediate students will find that this dictionary has everything they may need.

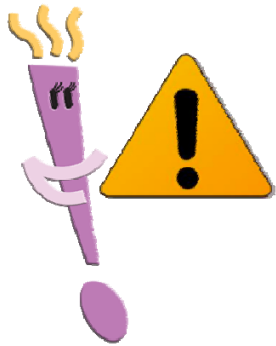
### **Collins Pocket French Dictionary**

Nice basic bilingual dictionary, beginners and travelers can get by with it, but if they use it regularly, they’ll soon realize this dictionary’s limitations as it is only big enough for the essentials.

**Bescherelle** 12,000 A *Bescherelle* is a French language grammar reference book best known for its verb conjugations volumes. The reference book uses example sentences to demonstrate proper French grammar. A Complete Guide to conjugating verbs.



### **Translation Cautions**



As a student or parent, it is important to be very cautious when using translation tools. The accuracy of translations obtained through computer sites or other sources can be problematic. The translations should never be considered 100 percent accurate interpretations and should only be considered as possible helpful ways to obtain the general idea (gist) of information.

The problems arise when translations attempt to translate text, word for word. In such cases, some phrases, if translated literally, make no sense. Computer sites or translating tools do not have the ability to deal adequately with the various complexities of language (e.g., ambiguity, multiple word meanings, idioms, the influence of context and cultural nuances).

It takes a great deal of hard work to become truly proficient in a new language. Students may try to minimize their effort by using translation tools. Ideally, your child should be encouraged to initially think in French while completing homework. If he or she is struggling with word choice, proper vocabulary and sentence starters, only then should translation tools be integrated to help.

Although online translation tools are wonderful resources, there are a few rules and more effective strategies to consider before attempting to translate French material:

Use an online dictionary or software dictionaries if necessary and available.

- With modern technology, a dictionary is almost as fast as a translator.

When a word is entered, several choices are offered as possible translations of that word.

Use bilingual dictionaries for checking the meanings of new words.

Use monolingual dictionaries to check the usage of the new words in the source language and in the target language.

Use related encyclopaedias or glossary lists for specialized terms

Refer to specialized magazines and journals to help you familiarize yourself with the text, particularly when it is a technical text.

Have a friend/relative who is a native speaker of that language help to translate

Use an online translator as a second opinion and/or to check work for simple phrases or a word or two.

Avoid translating full sentences using a translation tool. The sentence will inevitably lose some of the information or meaning. Consult a guidebook for translating lengthy passages.

Use a reputable source. Try the Yahoo and Google sources first to see if the answers can be found.

Anyone can set up a translator online.

Avoid translating word for word and remember to translate ideas and meaning.