

Placement of Adjectives in French

Understanding adjective placement in French: when do adjectives go before a noun?

Adjectives play a crucial role in adding depth to your French conversations. However, understanding where to place them in a sentence can be tricky for learners.

In most cases, adjectives in French come **after** the noun they modify, but there are some exceptions which can make this rule seem more like a guideline.

Let's explore the world of adjectives in French and when and why some go before the noun.

B.A.N.G.S.

To help you remember which adjectives go before the noun, you can use the acronym **BANGS**, which stands for Beauty, Age, Number, Goodness and Size.

Beauty

In French, adjectives that convey the idea of beauty come before nouns. For example:

un beau livre -	a beautiful book
une belle armoire -	a beautiful wardrobe
un bel oiseau -	a beautiful bird
une jolie maison -	a pretty house

Age

When discussing age, adjectives like vieux / vieille ("old") come before the noun, as in:

un vieux château -	an old castle
une vieille maison -	an old house

Number

Adjectives related to numbers, such as premier / première ("first") and deuxième ("second"), are placed before the noun. For instance:

le premier jour -	the first day
la deuxième fois -	the second time

Goodness

Adjectives like bon / bonne ("good") and mauvais(e) ("bad") are positioned before nouns. For example:

le bon gâteau -	the good cake
la mauvaise nouvelle -	the bad piece of news

Size

Adjectives describing size, such as grand(e) (“large”) and petit(e) (“small”), also go before the noun. For instance:

un grand canapé - a large sofa

une petite table - a little table

Adjectives with two possibilities

Now, here’s where it gets interesting. Some adjectives can be placed before **or** after the noun – and their placement alters the meaning. Here are some of them. In each pair of examples, notice how the meaning of the adjective changes, depending on whether it comes before or after the noun.

ancien / ancienne

mon ancienne maison - my former house

la maison ancienne - the old house

cher / chère

Cher Mark ... Dear Mark ...

un canapé cher - an expensive sofa

curieux / curieuse

une curieuse recette - a strange recipe

mon ami curieux - my curious friend

dernier / dernière

le dernier mois de l’année - the last month of the year

le mois dernier - last month

vrai / vraie

C’est une vraie Rolex ? - Is it an actual Rolex?

C’est une histoire vraie. - It’s a true story.

propre

C’est ma propre chambre - It’s my own bedroom.

ma chambre propre - my tidy bedroom

In conclusion

Understanding these exceptions and nuances in adjective placement can be a huge boost in your French fluency and allow you to express your ideas more precisely.

So, whether you're describing a beautiful landscape or discussing your dear friend, mastering the placement of adjectives will help you convey your thoughts and opinions effectively.

The table below contains a more extensive list of adjectives that have a different meaning depending on whether they are placed before or after the noun.

Adjective	Meaning Before a Noun	Meaning After a Noun	Examples
ancien	former	old	mon ancienne maison une maison ancienne
brave	respectable	courageous, brave	un brave homme un homme brave
certain	certain (particular)	certain (sure)	un certain âge j'en suis certain
cher	dear	expensive	cher ami un livre cher
curieux	curious (odd)	curious (interested)	une curieuse histoire un homme curieux
dernier	last (of all)	last (most recent)	la dernière semaine la semaine dernière
drôle	strange	amusing, funny	une drôle d'histoire une histoire drôle
grand (only with homme)	great	tall	un grand homme un homme grand
pauvre	poor (pitiful)	poor (without money)	le pauvre homme un homme pauvre
prochain	next (when it happens again)	next (soon, coming)	la prochaine fois la semaine prochaine
propre	own	clean	ma propre chambre ma chambre propre
pur	simple, nothing but	pure, fresh	une pure formalité l'air pur
sacré	damn good/ awesome	holy	un sacré livre un livre sacré
sale	disgusting	dirty	une sale histoire une chambre sale
seul	only	alone	la seule fois il est seul
simple	just, single	- modest, humble - simple, uncomplicated	une simple chaise des gens simples un poème simple
vrai	real, actual	true	C'est un vrai problème. C'est une histoire vraie.