



# Tu or Vous: The Ultimate Guide

## French Lesson

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## Video transcript

Hey there and welcome to Ablas! In this video, we'll look at the difference between "tu", which is the informal and singular you, and "vous", which is the formal or plural you. We'll go through all the scenarios you'll need to speak confidently, and there's a quick quiz to test your understanding at the end of the video. Be sure to download the PDF of today's lesson from the link in the description!

### When to use 'tu'

Let's start by seeing when "tu" can be used in everyday life.

Tu is used in the following situations. With family members, friends, and romantic partners. It's also used with peers - this could be fellow students, colleagues you know well, or even people at a party - and those in a similar age bracket to you. Teenagers, for example, would often use this form when speaking to other teenagers. It's also used when speaking to anyone younger than you, especially children, regardless of your relationship to them. And lastly, it's used when addressing animals like pets, praying to God, and towards inanimate objects, either affectionately, or in frustration.

Let's look at some examples using tu.

| English   | French  |
|---|---|
| Dude, you took my car again without asking? You're really pushing it! | Mec, t'as encore pris ma voiture sans demander ? T'abuses sérieux ! |
| Kitty, you've torn the curtains again! But I love you anyway.         | Minou, t'as encore déchiré les rideaux ! Mais je t'aime quand même. |
| Would you like me to help you find your mum, little one?              | Tu veux que je t'aide à retrouver ta maman, petit ?                 |

The first speaker was talking to his brother, which explains the use of the informal you. In informal French, you might have noticed that "tu as" becomes "t'as." This is a common contraction when we speak fast in French.

The second person was talking to their cat – she said: "Minou, t'as encore déchiré les rideaux !"

And lastly, we heard someone talk to a child, which is another reason to use tu.

## When to use 'vous'

We've seen where "tu" can be used, so let's take a look at "vous".

Vous is used in other situations, such as the following. With strangers or people you don't know well - this could be a shopkeeper or a waiter in a restaurant. It's also used if you're speaking to those a lot older than you, as a way of showing respect. This also extends out to anyone else you should show respect to, be it teachers, employers, or officials, and in professional or formal settings. And lastly, this form is the correct way to address any group of people, regardless of your relationship with them individually.

Now let's look at some example sentences with vous.

| English   | French  |
|---|---|
| Excuse me, could you tell me where the nearest pharmacy is?                 | Excusez-moi, vous pourriez me dire où se trouve la pharmacie la plus proche ? |
| Madam Director, I would like to speak with you about our marketing project. | Madame la Directrice, je voudrais vous parler de notre projet marketing.      |
| Okay kids, are you ready for the class photo?                               | Les enfants, vous êtes prêts pour la photo de classe ?                        |

In the first example, we heard someone asking for directions to the nearest pharmacy. Because he was asking a stranger, instead of saying, "Excuse-moi, tu pourrais..." he said, "Excusez-moi, vous pourriez..."

The next example was spoken in a business context, hence the more formal tone.

And the last one was a teacher speaking to a group of children. We saw earlier that when speaking to a child, we use tu, but since we're talking to a group of children, we need to use vous. Notice this sentence: "vous êtes prêts ?" - there's an 's' on the end to indicate multiple people. If we were using vous to refer to just one person, there wouldn't be an 's' on the end.

## **What to do if you're not sure**

It can be difficult in some situations to decide which is the best form to use. Follow these steps if you're not sure.

The first question is really simple: are you talking to more than one person? If you are, then you'll always use vous. If not, then first check if it's an obvious situation. We covered a few common scenarios earlier in the video, but if you're still unsure, we'll move on to the next step!

If you're with people around your age or the atmosphere is pretty relaxed, you might want to use tu. You can do this by simply asking them. On peut se tutoyer? Be prepared though - they might prefer to keep things formal: Je préfère qu'on se vouvoie. Here's a helpful tip: if someone starts using tu with you, it's usually okay to use it back. But there are some exceptions! For example, a teacher might use it with students, but students should still use vous with the teacher.

And finally, if you're still not sure, just use vous. It's better to be too formal than too casual. You can always become more casual later.

## **Conversation**

Now it's time to step into a real-life conversation!

|               | English   | French  |
|---------------|---|---|
|               | Sophie is looking forward to her birthday party tonight. She is a marketing executive in Paris, and is currently talking with her boss. | Sophie est impatiente de fêter son anniversaire ce soir. Elle est responsable marketing à Paris et discute en ce moment avec sa chef.               |
| Sophie:       | Good morning, Mrs. Lambert, would you like me to prepare the files for this afternoon's meeting?  | Bonjour, Madame Lambert, vous voulez que je prépare les dossiers pour la réunion de cet après-midi ?  |
| Mrs. Lambert: | Yes please, Sophie. And could you call the client to confirm they're still available? We need to be certain about the time.             | Oui, Sophie. Et est-ce que vous pourriez appeler le client pour confirmer qu'il est toujours disponible ? Nous avons besoin d'être sûrs de l'heure. |
|               | Just as Sophie begins working on the files, her younger brother Tom calls her.  | Alors que Sophie commence à travailler sur les dossiers, son jeune frère Tom l'appelle.   |
| Sophie:       | Hi Tom! What are you doing calling me at work? You know I'm busy in the mornings.   | Salut Tom ! Pourquoi tu m'appelles au travail ? Tu sais que je suis très occupée le matin.  |
| Tom:          | Hey sis, I need to borrow your car this evening. Mine's at the garage again.  | Hé, frangine, j'ai besoin d'emprunter ta voiture ce soir. La mienne est encore au garage.   |
|               | During her lunch break, Sophie finds herself lost while doing some errands.   | Pendant sa pause déjeuner, Sophie se retrouve perdue en faisant quelques courses.   |

|                  | English   | French   |
|------------------|---|--|
| Sophie:          | Excuse me sir, could you tell me where the nearest post office is? I think I've taken a wrong turn.                   | Excusez-moi monsieur, vous pourriez me dire où se trouve le bureau de poste le plus proche ? Je crois que je me suis trompée de chemin.                    |
| Stranger:        | Of course, it's just around the corner on Rue Victor Hugo. You can't miss it.   | Bien sûr, c'est au coin de la rue Victor Hugo. Vous ne pouvez pas la manquer.  |
|                  | Finally home after a long day at work, Sophie is greeted by her cat before getting ready to host her birthday dinner. | Enfin rentrée chez elle après une longue journée de travail, Sophie est accueillie par son chat avant de se préparer à organiser son dîner d'anniversaire. |
| Sophie:          | Come here, Misty! Have you been waiting for me all day, sweetheart?   | Viens ici, Misty ! Tu m'as attendue toute la journée, ma chérie ?  |
|                  | Later that evening, her guests arrive for dinner.   | Plus tard dans la soirée, ses invités arrivent pour le dîner.  |
| Sophie:          | Hello everyone! I'm so happy you could all make it! Please, make yourselves comfortable.                              | Bonsoir à tous ! Je suis ravie que vous ayez pu venir ! Mettez-vous à l'aise.  |
| Sophie's Friend: | Happy birthday, you!  | Joyeux anniversaire, toi !   |

## It's quiz time!

So, did you understand the different scenarios in that conversation? Feel free to leave us a comment with any questions. But we're not done yet – it's quiz time!

### How should you address a group of your closest friends at a party?

- A. Use vous
- B. Both are correct
- C. Use tu

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The correct answer is vous, because it's a group of people.

### Your family cat has knocked over a vase. What do you say?

- A. Tu as cassé le vase !
- B. Vous avez cassé le vase !
- C. Both are correct

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The correct answer is... Tu as cassé le vase ! This is because we always use tu when speaking to animals.

### How would you ask someone if you want to use tu?

- A. On peut se tutoie ?
- B. On peut se vouvoyer ?
- C. On peut se tutoyer ?

\_\_\_\_\_

The correct answer is... On peut se tutoyer ?

## Your task

Well done for getting this far!

Now your task is to create a short dialogue between two strangers that eventually become friends. Think how they might change between "tu" and "vous".

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