

FRENCH GUIDE- GENEALOGY

Reading French records is not as complicated as you may think! The key to success is as simple as knowing what words to look for, and what words to ignore. This guide will help you read baptism, birth, marriage and death records like a pro.

KEY WORDS	
Act	Acte
Appeared	Est comparu(e), sont comparus
Banns	Publications, bans
Baptism	Baptême, baptis(é/ée)
Birth	Naissance, n(é/ée)
Burial	Sépulture, enterrement, enterré(e)
Church/Parish	Eglise, paroisse, actes paroissiaux
Civil registry	Registres de l'état civil, le mairie, maison communale
Confirmation	Confirmation
Death	Décès, mort, expiré, défunt(e)
Declarant, declared	Déclarant(s), a/ont déclaré
Given name	Prénom, nom de baptême
Index	Index, tables
Je dis...	Or rather... (correction)
Last name, surname	Nom de famille
Marriage	Mariage, alliance, unir, joindre, épouser
Town, village	Ville, village, commune

RELATIONSHIPS	
Brother/sister	Frère/sœur
Child	Enfant (not infant!)
Father/mother	Père/mère
Godfather/godmother	Parain/marraine
Him/her	Lui
Husband	Mari, époux, conjoint
Junior/senior	Le jeune/l'aîné
Single/unmarried	Célibataire
Son/daughter	Fils/fille
Widower/widow	Veuf/veuve
Wife	Epouse, femme, conjointe
Witness	Témoin
___-in-law (Beau-/belle-)	When added to front: Beau-frère = brother-in-law Belle-mère = mother-in-law
Step- (Demi-/demie-)	When added to front: Demi-père = step-father Demie-sœur = step-sister

DATE/TIME CALCULATION	
Hour	Heure(s)
Day	Jour
Month	Mois
Year	L'an, L'année
Yesterday	Hier, la veille, le jour d'hier
Today	Au jour d'hui, ce jour d'hui, le même jour, le courant
The same	Le courant, le même, aussi
Morning	Matin
Noon	Midi
Afternoon/evening	L'après-midi, la soirée
January	Janvier
February	Février
March	Mars
April	Avril
May	Mai
June	Juin
July	Juillet
August	Auguste
September	Septembre, 7bre
October	Octobre, 8bre
November	Novembre, 9bre
December	Décembre, 10bre

OCCUPATIONS	
Agriculteur, cultivateur, fermier	Farmer, gardener
Journalier/journalière	Day-laborer
Verrier	Glassblower
Maréchal-ferrant	Blacksmith
Garde-champêtre	Field guard
Ménager/ménagère	Housekeeper
Sage-femme/obstétricienne	Mid-wife
Médecin	Doctor
Charbonnier	Charcoal burner
Tailleur(e)	Tailor
Cloutier	Nail-smith, nailer
Cordonnier	Shoemaker
Domestique	Servant
Tisserand	Weaver
Briquetier, maçon	Brickmaker, mason
Citoyen(ne)	Citizen

Spelling Variations		
OLDER	NEWER	Example
-bv-	-v-	febvrier/février
-ct-	-t-	faites/faites
-i-	-j-	iour/jour
-os-	-ô-	nostre/nôtre
-sç-	-s-	sçavoir/savoir
-y-	-i-	hyer/hier
-y-	-ill-	fyeul/filleul

NUMBERS

CARDINAL NUMBERS

In English, many people are familiar with the word “four-score.” A “score” represents “twenty.” Four scores, or 4 x 20 is another way of writing “eighty.”

Numbers in French has a similar system of using smaller sets of numbers to represent bigger numbers.

70 = soixante-dix (60 + 10)

71 = soixante-onze (60 + 11) (cont. through 79)

80 = quatre-vingt(s) (4 X 20)

81 = quatre-vingt-un (4 X 20 + 1) (cont. through 89)

90 = quatre-vingt-dix (4 X 20 + 10)

91 = quatre-vingt-onze (4 X 20 + 11) (cont. through 99)

*Note that in some of the older French records, you might come across much easier versions: septante (70), octante (80), and nonante (90).

1 un	25 vingt-cinq
2 deux	26 vingt-six
3 trois	27 vingt-sept
4 quatre	28 vingt-huit
5 cinq	29 vingt-neuf
6 six	30 trente
7 sept	40 quarante
8 huit	50 cinquante
9 neuf	60 soixante
10 dix	70 soixante-dix, septante
11 onze	80 quatre-vingts, octante
12 douze	90 quatre-vingt-dix, nonante
13 treize	100 cent
14 quatorze	101 cent-un
15 quinze	150 cent cinquante
16 seize	200 deux-cent
17 dix-sept	300 trois-cent
18 dix-huit	400 quatre-cent
19 dix-neuf	500 cinq-cent
20 vingt	600 six-cents
21 vingt-et-un	700 sept-cent
22 vingt-deux	800 huit-cent
23 vingt-trois	900 neuf-cent
24 vingt-quatre	1000 mil(le)

ORDINAL NUMBERS

Non-English speakers find English ordinal numbers tricky! “One” becomes “first,” “two” becomes “second” and “three” becomes “third.”

In French, almost all cardinal numbers are converted into an ordinal number simply by adding “**ième**” to the end.

There are only a few exceptions to this rule:

- “Un” → premier/première
- The “f” in “neuf” becomes a “v” (neuvième)
- Numbers ending in “e” lose “e” (ex. Onze → onzième, not onzeième)

1st premier, première	25th vingt-cinquième
2nd deuxième	26th vingt-sixième
3rd troisième	27th vingt-septième
4th quatrième	28th vingt-huitième
5th cinquième	29th vingt-neuvième
6th sixième	30th trentième
7th septième	40th quarantième
8th huitième	50th cinquantième
9th neuvième	60th soixantième
10th dixième	70th septantième, soixante dixième
11th onzième	80th quatre-vingtième, octantième
12th douzième	90th quatre-vingt-dixième, nonantième
13th treizième	100th centième
14th quatorzième	101st cent-unième
15th quinzième	150th cent cinquantième
16th seizième	200th deux-centième
17th dix-septième	300th trois-centième
18th dix-huitième	400th quatre-centième
19th dix-neuvième	500th cinq-centième
20th vingtième	600th six-centième
21st vingt et unième	700th sept-centième
22nd vingt-deuxième	800th huit-ième
23rd vingt-troisième	900th neuf-centième
24th vingt-quatrième	1000th un millième

ABBREVIATED ORDINAL NUMBERS

Just like English, French ordinal numbers can be represented by adding “e” or the degree sign “°” to the number.

Premier = 1er, 1°

Deuxième = 2e, 2°

BAPTISMS

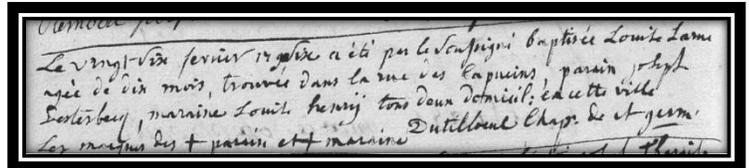
_____ (date of baptism)	a été baptisé(e) baptized was	_____ (name of child)	[né(e) _____] [who was born on _____]	_____ fils/fille the son/daughter
[légitime/illégitime/naturel(le)] [legitimate/illegitimate/natural]	de of	_____ (father) *sometimes also residence	et _____; and (mother) *sometimes also residence	
le parrain a été _____; the godfather was _____;		la marraine a été _____ the godmother was _____		

BAPTISMAL/BIRTH RECORD WORDS	
Ainsi nommé(e) pour avoir...	Who was thus named for having been born...
Baptême d'urgence	Emergency baptism
Baptême, baptis(é/ée)	Baptism
Enfant	Child (not infant!)
Epoux(se), mari(e), femme	Spouse/wife
Fils/fille	Son/Daughter
Inconnu(e)	Unknown
Jumeau	Twin
Le même...	On the same....
Légitime	Legitimate
Marraine	Godmother
Masculin/féminin	Male/Female
Naissance, est né(é/ée), accouchement, s'est accouchée	Birth, was born, gave birth
Nature(l/le), illégitime	Natural/illegitimate
Obstétricien(ne)	Midwife
Parrain	Godfather
Père/mère	Father/Mother
Sage-femme	Midwife
Sous condition	Conditional baptism

TIPS

- ❖ Baptism records don't always have a standardized way of expressing the date of the act. For example, 1 September 1690 could be written in numerous ways:
 - 1) 1er du mois de septembre, i690
 - 2) i 7bre; l'an 1690
 - 3) l'an mil six-cent quatre-vingt-dix, le premier jour du mois de septembre
- ❖ If you see the phrase "ainsi nommé(e)" it is most likely stating that the child was named after the Catholic Saint of the day they were born.
- ❖ **Né(e)** might indicate the child's birth is mentioned in the baptismal act. Words such as "**hier**," "**le même jour**" and "**au jourd'hui**" describe when the child was born in relation to the date of the baptism.
- ❖ **Le même jour a été baptisé** means the baptism took place on the same day as the prior entry.
- ❖ Sometimes, the **obstétricienne/sage-femme**, or midwife, would perform an emergency baptism (**baptême d'urgence**). Babies who lived would be rebaptized by the parish priest **sous condition**, or under certain/special conditions. See "The Ultimate Latin Guide" for more information.
- ❖ You might come across extra information after the name of each parent. This might indicate the parish or commune the person resides (**domicilié/résident**), was born (**natif de**) and sometimes where they were baptized.

IRREGULAR RECORD: FOUND IN THE STREET...



In this record, a baptism was performed for a 10-month-old girl who was found in a street of "capucins" (likely the road of a monastery or other church establishment).

French: Le vingt-six février 1796 a été par le soussigné baptisée Louise Lam- agée de dix mois, trouvée dans la rue des Capucins, parain Joseph Lesterbecq, maraine Louise Henry tous deux domicile : en cette ville les marques des parain et maraine.

Translation: On 26 February, 1796 was baptized, by the below-signed, Louise Lam- aged ten months, found in the street of the capuchins, the godfather was Joseph Lesterbecq, the godmother Louise Henry, both residents of this town. The marks of the godfather and the godmother.

CIVIL BIRTHS

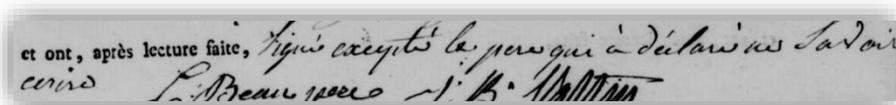
1. L'an ____ le ____ jour du mois de ____ à ____ heure(s) du... Year ____, the ____ day of the month of ____ [skip: exact time doesn't matter]	pardevant nous [skip: insignificant legalese]	2. est/sont comparu(e/s) appeared
3. _____, [occupation], agé(e) de __ ans, domicilié(e) à _____, (name of declarant), ____, aged __ years, resident of __, [repeated for each declarant]	... a/ont 4. déclaré que (if présenté, switch positions 5 & 6) who declared to us that	
5. _____ est né(e) (date/when) was born	6. un enfant du sexe (masculin/féminin), a child of the m/f sex,	7. de _____ et de _____ of (father) and of (mother) *de lui le déclarant- father is person in step 3
8. auquel/à laquelle [on] a déclaré donné le(s) prénom(s) de _____ ... to whom [the declarant] declared to give them for their first names (name of child)	9.	

For the most part, French civil birth records have the same format. There are always exceptions, however! As you get more comfortable with translating, you will learn what words to look for to find the vital details.

1. The first thing you will come across in a civil birth record is the date the act was recorded. Mark down this date, as it may be needed to calculate the child's actual birth.
2. Skip to the phrase "sont comparus," and any of its variants. The information you skipped is unimportant legalese, or details about where, when and by whom the act was recorded.
3. Note the name of at least the first declarant, as this was often the father of the child. If the first declarant is later revealed to be the father, it might be helpful to look back at his profession, age and residency.
- 4: The next key word to look for is "déclaré que." This phrase marks the beginning point of the actual registry. If you find the phrase "nous a/ont présenté," swap order of 5 & 6, as the record will start with the sex of the child and then give birth info. This will look something like this: "nous a présenté un enfant du sexe masculin, né ce jourd'hui..." Otherwise, continue to 5.
5. Immediately following "que" will be the D.O.B. Most often, you will have to calculate the date of birth based on the date of the civil registration. See the table below for translation:

TODAY (date written in #1)	YESTERDAY (day before #1)	OTHER
Aujourd'hui Ce jourd'hui Le meme jour Le courant	Hier Le jour précédent Le jour d'hier La veille	Le __ du courant (different day, same month and year as #1) Le __ de ____, ____ (completely different date than #1)

6. The gender of the child is revealed by the phrase "un enfant du sexe (masculin/féminin)."
7. The parents are listed next. If it says "de lui le déclarant/comparant," the father is the declarant found in 3. Otherwise, it will say "de _____ et de _____," with possibly more info after each name (such as occupation, age or marriage status).
8. The next part gives the name of the child. It will look something like this: "auquel/(à laquelle il/elle/on a déclaré donné les prénoms de _____." Note that the words **auquel** (masc.) and **à laquelle** (femin.) (meaning "to whom") do not necessarily correlate with the gender of the child. In French, every noun is masculine or feminine. If the French word for "to whom" is replacing the word "enfant" (masc.), it will appear as "auquel," even if the baby is female.
9. The next section is usually unimportant; however, it might do you well to skim through it, in case there is some hidden jewel. At the end of every birth act, all declarants and witnesses would sign. A signature of the father might help you differentiate between your Jean Bouton (who knows how to sign) and a Jean Bouton in town who can't write.



« et ont, après lecture faite, signé excepté le père qui a déclaré ne savoir écrire »
TRANSLATION:
"and who, after the reading, all signed except the father who declared he did not know how to write."

DEATHS

1. L'an ____, le __ (jour) du mois de ____, Year ____, le __ (day) of the month of ____ [skip: not important]	à __ heures...	2. est/sont comparu(s) appeared
3. ____, âgé de __ ans, [occupation], (declarant), aged __ years, (occupation),	____ du défunt(e), domicilié à _____, (relationship) of the deceased, resident of (place), (repeated)	... a/ont déclaré que declared to us that
4. _____, à __ heures de _____, (date of death), [skip: exact time of death doesn't matter]	5. _____, âgé(e) de __ ans, [occupation], (name of deceased), aged __ years, [occupation],	né(e)/nati(f/ve) de _____, born in/native of (name of place)
6. [veu(f/ve) de]/[époux de] _____, widow(er) of/spouse of (name)	7. fil(s)/fille de [défunt(e)] _____ et _____ son/daughter of the deceased (father) and (mother)	est décédé(e).. died...
les déclarants ont signé avec nous... the declarants have signed with us...		

Belgium death records present similarly to birth acts.

1. Just like in the birth records, you will want to note down the date of the act to help you later calculate the death date.

2. Skip all parts until you see the phrase “**est/sont comparu(s).**”

3. Make sure and note the name of the declarant if he has a relationship to the deceased. Finding words such as *frère*, *fil(s)*, *beau-frère*, *oncle*, *père* or *neveu* (nephew) means the declarant is related to the deceased. Words like *ami* and *voisin* indicate there is no close relationship. Check each declarant listed in the record.

4. “**Déclaré que**” marks the beginning of the death record. Immediately after this phrase, you will typically see a word indicating the date of death (relative to the day the act was recorded; see step 1). The exact time of death will also be recorded, but this is not important information.

Words indicating date of death:

TODAY (date written in #1)	YESTERDAY (day before #1)	OTHER
Aujourd’hui Ce jourd’hui Le même jour Le courant	Hier Le jour précédent Le jour d’hier La veille	Le __ du courant (different day, same month and year as #1) Le __ de ____, ____ (completely different date than #1)

5. Vital information about the deceased is given here, including name, age, occupation, birth place and residence.

6. If the deceased was a widow/widower or has a living spouse, it will often be mentioned in the death. The words *célibataire* and *célibatrice*, means the deceased was single, or had never married.

7. Next, the parents of the deceased will be listed. Note that *enfant* does not necessarily mean the deceased was an infant, but rather that they were a child. Sometimes the recorder mentioned if the parents of the deceased were living or dead.

*TIP: Death records can contain inaccuracies. Some declarants were not related to the deceased, and did not always know or remember vital information. Don’t be surprised if you find errors.

At this point, you have extracted the most you can from the death record. What follows is typically a statement of who signed and who didn’t. This may be helpful in certain cases, as previously noted.

MARRIAGES

1. L'an ____ le ____ jour du mois de ____ à ____ heure(s) ... pardevant nous sont comparus Year ____, the ____ day of the month of ____ [skip: time doesn't matter] [skip: insignificant legalese] appeared		
GROOM	2. ____, [occupation], agé de __ ans, __ mois, __ jours, (Name of groom), [occupation], aged __ years, __ months, __ days,	
4. ... libre d'obligation ... [skip: military service]	5A. veuf en [premier/second] ... widower in first marriage to *See 5A below.	
	3. né à ____ le ____, domicilié à ____ born in (place) on (date of birth), currently residing in (place)	
	5B. fils de ____ et de ____... son of (father's name) and of (mother's name) *See 5B below.	
BRIDE	et, [d'autre part],	
	2. ____, [occupation], agée de __ ans, __ mois, __ jours, (Name of bride), [occupation], aged __ years, __ months, __ days,	
5A. veuve en [premier/second] ... widow in first marriage to *See 5A below.	3. née à ____ le ____, domiciliée à ____ born in (place) on (date of birth), currently residing in (place)	
	5B. fille de ____ et de ____... daughter of (father's name) and of (mother's name) *See 5B below.	
6. lesquels nous ont requis... [skip: unimportant transition]	7. ... publications ... [skip: only publications]	8. ... au nom du loi , que ____ et ____ sont unis par le mariage ...in the name of the law, that [GROOM] and [BRIDE] were united in marriage
9A. ... ont déclaré qu'il est né d'eux un enfant... declared that there was born of them a child... *See 9A	9B. en présence de ____ (cont.) in the presence of (name of witness) *See 9B	

Acts of marriage are difficult to read; they are detailed, long and inconsistent. It may be tempting to gloss over the original image, but you might miss out on crucial vital details! Thoroughly reading an act can lead to discoveries of births, prior marriages, deaths, family members and perhaps the most important- **formerly illegitimate children** that become legitimized by the marriage. Buckle in, take your time, and you will inevitably fall in love with civil marriage records in Belgium.

STEPS:

1. L'an _____, le _____ du mois de _____

Opening each marriage record is the date of marriage, which is usually written out in full. After the date is unimportant details about where the marriage took place and who performed it. Skip until you see "**sont comparus**."

2.**sont comparus** _____, [occupation], âgé(e) de ____ ans, ____ mois, ____ jours,

The first person to be named on a marriage record will be the groom. After all information is given for the groom, the bride is named in a similar fashion. Occupations and ages were recorded. Often times, the age was calculated based on the birth act to the exact day, but be aware! Mistakes are common. In order for a couple to get married, an extract of the original birth record would have to be delivered to the official performing the marriage. Sometimes, the incorrect birth would be delivered. You may run into cases where the birth of an earlier, deceased sibling with the same name was instead delivered.

3. né(e) à _____ le _____, domicilié(e) à _____,

The birth place and date is listed here. If you see the phrase "*y domicilié*," it translates to "living there," and means the individual resides in the same place they were born.

4. *libre d'obligation... la milice nationale.... délivré...*

The next few lines give proof that the groom fulfilled his militia obligations. This rule was enforced at the time of marriage. You can skip this part until you see "**veuf**" *5A or " **fils**" *5B.

5A. **veuf/veuve** en premier/second nocés de _____,

Occasionally, the groom was a widower. The name and death date of prior spouses is listed.

5B. *fil*/*fille* [*mineure/majeure/légitime/célibat(aire/rice)*] de _____ et de _____, [*ici présents et consentants*];

The parents were listed next, along with their occupation, place of residence and whether they were deceased, or were present at the marriage and consenting. If you see words like *défunt(e)/décédé(e)/mort(e)*, that parent was dead prior to the marriage. Usually, the death date and place are recorded on the marriage act.

6. *lesquels nous ont requis de procéder...*

This section can be skipped.

7. *et dont les publications ont été faites....*

Publications usually don't contain much more information than the marriage acts, but if you are interested in finding them, the dates and places that the publications were made will be mentioned at this line. Otherwise, skip until the phrase *au nom du loi, que...*

8. *au nom du loi, que [GROOM] et [BRIDE] sont unis par le mariage,*

At this point, there are two more things you should look for: 9A) legitimized children and 9B) relationships of witnesses to the couple.

9A. *ont déclaré qu'il est né d'eux un enfant...*

This phrasing indicates that the couple had previously had a child they wished to legitimize by their marriage. It is **very important** to read through this part, as it will cite where you can find the birth act. In birth records, illegitimate children are listed with their mother's last name, and the father is rarely mentioned. Once legitimized, the child takes the last name of the father, and will appear on every pursuant record (i.e., marriage, death) with that name. In some places, the recorder would go back and write in the margins of the birth record that the child was legitimized by a marriage. This wasn't always followed through, however.

9A General Format:

et aussitôt lesdits époux ont déclaré qu'il est né d'eux un enfant <small>and after which, the said couple declared that there was born of them a child</small>	du sexe [<i>masculin/féminin</i>], <small>of the [male/female] sex,</small>
inscrit sur les registres de l'état civile de _____ le _____, <small>recorded in the registers of the civil state of (name of place), on (date of act, not date of birth),</small>	sous les prénoms et nom de _____, <small>under the first and last name of (name of child),</small>
lequel ils reconnaissent pour leur <i>fil</i> / <i>fille</i> , qu'ils entendent légitimer par ce mariage <small>who they claim/recognize to be their son/daughter, that they wish to legitimize by this marriage</small>	

9B. *en présence de...*

This section contains information on the witnesses of the marriage. First, read the names of each witness. If one of them has a last name that might be related to the couple, look for words such as *frère, oncle, beau-frère*. These words will describe either the relationship with the groom (*époux*) or the bride (*épouse*). The cursive *x* and *se* can be hard to distinguish in some records. The word *ami* (friend) and *voisin* (neighbor) mean that there is no special relationship between the individual and the couple.

*TIP- Most marriages are visually broken up into sections. Familiarizing yourself with a specific town's method of record-keeping will help you easily locate what you need to know.