



Learning French with Cinema

Viewing French films is one of the most enjoyable ways to improve your French, and one of the easiest ways for you to connect to French culture and language. Many students frequently ask us to recommend films that are appropriate for their language level, but this is not always a simple thing to do.

Although some films have dialog that is easier to understand than others, it is still a fairly impossible task to classify French films according to CECR levels. Pronunciation, regional accents, level of language (amount of slang), speed of the dialog, level of abstraction, association of the dialog with the action, use of historical vocabulary, and socio-cultural references that you may not understand are all factors which enter into play and make a precise classification quite difficult.

However, the use of film is an excellent language-learning tool for all levels and should not be missed. The following document will provide you with some tips and learning goals at your level, as well as some suggested film titles.

General comments:

- French films reflect the diversity of the culture and should be studied for their socio-cultural aspects as much as language. Look at the way people interact, how they speak with each other, customs of greeting, facial and body language, etc. Understanding the cultural insights onto how language is used in different situations is as important as understanding the language itself.
- Look at the way the French (and Francophones) eat, decorate their homes, the streetscapes, the monuments and countryside, etc.
- Familiarize yourself with the names of the directors and the type of films they make. These people are cult figures in France. In order to help you learn them, the films are arranged on the shelf in alphabetical order by the *director's* last name
- Who are the leading French actors? Do you have a favorite?
- All the DVDs in the FIAF Library have English language subtitles unless otherwise noted
- DVDs with French subtitles: the Library has several French films with French-language subtitles, often a popular choice of students
- The films are classed by genre (policier, film d'action, etc), so picking a type of film you like best will be more enjoyable for you. You can check in the notebook on the atlas stand for these lists or you can do a search for them in the online catalog. (The genres are: comédie, comédie dramatique, comédie musicale, court-métrage, drame, drame

historique, drame psychologique, film de guerre, film d’animation, film d’aventure, film fantastique, film policier, thriller)

- Students also ask us to recommend to them “a good film”; but only you can know the ones that you would enjoy. Read the jewel case boxes for the summaries, and if you have any questions, ask us. We can always tell you which ones are the box-office hits in France

Viewing suggestions for language-learning:

- If you plan to watch the movie as entertainment only, then watch the whole film straight through; but if you want to use it as a language-learning tool, watch it in short sessions of 10 minutes each.
- Turn off the English subtitles! 80% of our perception is visual; so if you are absorbed in reading the English, you will not focus on listening to the dialog, and this is the skill you are trying to develop here. Select a short segment, listen to it three times and then turn on the subtitles to see if you got it right
- Play a game: try to isolate one word per sentence, or try just to determine the verb
- Another game you can play by level is “bingo”, which is especially fun if you are watching with friends or classmates (see below)
- You can close your eyes and listen to the dialog and try to repeat back what you heard
- Keep that DVD clicker in your hand! Stop. Go back. Listen to the sentence over again to see if you can get it. If you have not gotten the words after three times, move on
- Keep a notebook handy and jot down any unfamiliar words you are hearing. Look up the word right away in the dictionary. Note the context you heard it in, such as “*Mr. Dufayel said this to Amelie when they sat together at his easel* ” will help you always place the word in your visual memory
- Set yourself a goal of learning just 5 new words per day from watching a film
- By spending just 15 minutes a day watching a film, your listening comprehension will significantly increase. Make the effort and you will see for yourself
- Enjoy yourself and do not get frustrated. Keep the big picture in mind....and pass the popcorn!

| Level | Learning goals | Suggested titles |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| <p>A1</p> <p>Beginner</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If you are a beginning language learner, you will most likely not be able to understand much of the language, but you can observe the cultural elements ▪ Focus instead on hearing the natural sounds of the language ▪ Learn how people greet each other and introduce themselves, make requests, say no, make comments on the weather ▪ Pay attention to numbers ▪ Bingo: everytime you hear: moi/toi, allez!, je veux, or a number | <p>There are no feature length films specifically for this level; select from the B1 level</p> |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <p>A2 Advanced Beginner</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pay attention to the phrasing of sentences and tonal stress ▪ Pay attention to how people formulate requests and questions ▪ Pay attention to the use of the simple past tense (passé composé) ▪ Work on vocabulary building of the most commonly used words and expressions in everyday speech ▪ Bingo: everytime you hear : souvent, parfois, jamais, chez, on! ▪ You'll probably notice that by the end of the film, you've been able to understand bits and pieces of what you heard. You are on your way! | <p>There are no feature length films specifically for this level; select from the B1 level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain</i> (watch the scene where she helps the man cross the street: although she uses rapid-fire speech, try to isolate some of the things she is describing: Jambon! 79 francs!) ▪ <i>Princes et Princesses</i> |
| <p>B1 Intermediate</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At this level, you should be able to understand short spoken commands and easy dialog ▪ You should be able to follow the story ▪ Listen for conditional tenses ▪ Bingo: everytime you hear: ni/ni, dont | <p>The films suggested here may still be a little challenging but give them a try!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Décalage Horaire</i> ▪ <i>Le Dîner de Cons</i> ▪ <i>Fausto</i> ▪ <i>Le fils de l'épicier</i> |
| <p>B2 Advanced</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listen for any use of the subjunctive ▪ Bingo: anytime you hear a subjunctive tense ▪ At this level, you should be able to understand approximately 80% of any general film: good work! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Après vous</i> ▪ <i>L'Auberge espagnole</i> ▪ <i>La Bûche</i> ▪ <i>Les Choristes</i> ▪ <i>Coco avant Chanel</i> ▪ <i>Deux Jours à Paris</i> ▪ <i>Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain</i> ▪ <i>Fauteuils d'Orchestre</i> ▪ <i>Hors de Prix</i> ▪ <i>Indigènes</i> ▪ <i>Paris (Cédric Klapisch)</i> ▪ <i>Paris je t'aime</i> ▪ <i>Poupées russes</i> ▪ <i>Swimming Pool</i> |
| <p>C1-C2 Expert</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work on analyzing the socio-cultural elements of the film ▪ Enjoy historical dramas ▪ Encounter films from francophony countries ▪ Discover the great "classics" of the 30's-60s ▪ Tackle "policiers", usually very heavy on slang ▪ Learn to distinguish regional accents of French and Francophone countries | <p>At this level, you should be able to understand any film in the collection. Here are some suggestions for the points at left:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>100% Arabica</i> ▪ <i>L'Anglaise et le Duc</i> ▪ <i>Balzac</i> ▪ <i>Comte de Monte Cristo</i> ▪ <i>Danton</i> ▪ <i>Fabio Montale</i> ▪ <i>Farinelli</i> ▪ <i>Du Rififi chez les hommes</i> ▪ <i>Tous les Matins du Monde</i> |