

Introduction to French Composition

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Key concepts, structure, and practical tips for writing clear, effective French texts.

1. What Is “Composition” in French?

- **Definition:** A *composition* (la composition) is a written piece in which you develop a **central idea** through **organized paragraphs**, using appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and style.
- **Typical contexts:** school essays, university papers, business reports, personal letters, creative writing, and exam responses (e.g., *baccalauréat*).

2. Basic Types of French Compositions

Type	Purpose	Typical Length	Common Situations
Dissertation	Argumentative/analytical essay	600?1?200? words	Philosophy, history, literature exams
Rédaction	Narrative or descriptive text	200?500? words	Language proficiency tests (DELFS, DALF)
Essai	Personal reflection, critical analysis	800?1?500? words	University coursework, magazine articles
Lettre formelle	Formal communication (request, complaint)	150?300? words	Administrative or professional correspondence
Lettre informelle	Personal correspondence	100?250? words	Emails, postcards, friendly letters
Rapport	Objective presentation of data or findings	500?2?000? words	Business, scientific, technical contexts

3. General Structure of a French Essay

1. Introduction

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- **Amorce** (hook): a quotation, statistic, anecdote, or rhetorical question.
- **Contextualisation**: brief background information.
- **Problématique** (problem statement): the central question the essay will answer.
- **Annonce du plan** (outline): indicate the main sections (e.g., *d'abord... puis... enfin*).

2. Développement (body) – usually 2?3 parties

- **Partie?1** – first argument or aspect.
- **Partie?2** – second argument or aspect.
- **Partie?3** (optional) – third argument, counter?argument, or synthesis.
- **Structure interne** of each part:
 - *Phrase d'introduction* (topic sentence)
 - *Développement* (evidence, examples, analysis)
 - *Transition* (link to next part)

3. Conclusion

- **Bilan** (summary of main points).
- **Réponse** to the *problématique*.
- **Ouverture** (broader perspective, future question, or implication).

4. Planning Before Writing

Step	Action	Tips
1. Analyse du sujet	Identify verbs (<i>décrire, comparer, argumenter...</i>) and keywords.	Highlight the <i>verbe d'action</i> and any constraints (e.g., <i>à l'aide de</i>).
2. Formuler la problématique	Turn the subject into a question.	Use “Comment... ?”, “En quoi... ?”, “Pourquoi... ?”.
3. Brainstorming	List ideas, examples, citations, personal experiences.	Use a mind?map or bullet list.
4. Choisir le plan	Decide between <i>plan dialectique</i> (thèse? antithèse?synthèse) or <i>plan analytique</i> (chronologique, thématique, cause? conséquence).	The plan must directly answer the <i>problématique</i>