

French Nouns With Different Meanings Depending on Number

Some French nouns can only be singular, some can only be plural, and some have different meanings depending on whether they are singular or plural.

- *Abattis* (m) – Brushwood
- *Les abattis* (m) – Giblets, (informal) arms and legs, limbs
- *Assise* (f) – Wall support, foundation
- *Assises* (f) – Assembly, conference
- *Autorité* (f) – Authority
- *Les autorités* (f) – The authorities
- *Le barbe* – Barb
- *La barbe* – Beard
- *Les barbes* (f) – Ragged edge
- *Le bois* – Wood (in general), woodwind instrument
- *Les bois* (m) – Woodwind section
- *Le ciseau* – Chisel
- *Les ciseaux* (m) – Scissors
- *Le comble* – Height, peak; last straw (figurative)
- *Les combles* (m) – Attic
- *Le cuivre* – Copper
- *Les cuivres* (m) – Copper instruments, tools
- *La douceur* – Softness, gentleness
- *Les douceurs* (f) – Sweets, desserts; sweet talk
- *Eau* (f) – Water (in general)
- *Les eaux* (f) – River/lake/sea water, wake
- *Économie* (f) – Economics
- *Les économies* (f) – Savings
- *Écriture* (f) – Writing, (finance) entry
- *Les écritures* (f) – Accounts, books
- *La façon* – Way, manner, means
- *Les façons* (f) – Manners, behavior
- *Le fer* – Iron
- *Les fers* (m) – Chains, fetters
- *Le guide* – Guide (book, tour)
- *La guide* – Girl scout/guide
- *Les guides* (f) – Reins
- *Humanité* (f) – Humanity, mankind
- *Les humanités* (f) – Humanities, classics
- *Le lendemain* – The next day, the period right after
- *Les lendemains* (m) – Future, prospects, consequences
- *La lunette* – Telescope
- *Les lunettes* (f) – Glasses, spectacles
- *La mémoire* – Memory
- *Le mémoire* – Memorandum, report

- *Les mémoires* (m) — Memoirs
- *La menotte* — (babytalk) Hand
- *Les menottes* (f) — Handcuffs
- *Ouïe* (f) — (sense of) Hearing
- *Les ouïes* (f) — Gills
- *Le papier* — Paper
- *Les papiers* (m) — Documentation
- *La pâte* — Pastry, dough
- *Les pâtes* (f) — Pasta, noodles
- *Le ravage* — (Literary) pillaging
- *Les ravages* (m) — Havoc, ravages
- *Le status* — Status
- *Les status* (m) — Statutes
- *La toilette* — Toilette, hygiene, act of getting ready
- *Les toilettes* (f) — Lavatory, restroom
- *La vacance* — Vacancy
- *Les vacances* (f) — Vacation, holiday

When talking about arts and crafts, a singular noun indicates the activity itself, while both the singular and plural refer to the product.

- *Le cinéma* — Cinema, movie industry
- *Le(s) cinéma(s)* — Cinema(s), movie theater(s)
- *La couture* — Sewing
- *La (les) couture(s)* — Seam(s)
- *La danse* — Dancing
- *La (les) danse(s)* — Dance(s)
- *Le dessin* — The act of drawing
- *Le(s) dessin(s)* — Drawing(s)
- *La peinture* — The act of painting
- *La (les) peinture(s)* — Painting(s)
- *La sculpture* — The act of sculpting
- *La (les) sculpture(s)* — Sculpture(s)
- *Le théâtre* — Theater arts
- *Le(s) théâtre(s)* — Theaters(s)
- *Le tricot* — The act of knitting
- *Le(s) tricot(s)* — Sweater(s), jumper(s)

Languages are always singular (and always, au fait, masculine). When the name of a language is capitalized, both the singular and plural indicate people of that nationality.

- *Anglais* (m) — English language
- *Un Anglais, des Anglais* — An Englishman, English people
- *Arabe* (m) — Arabic language
- *Un Arabe, des Arabes* — An Arab, Arabs
- *Un Français, des Français* — A Frenchman, French people