French Pen Pals Made Easy

A Fun Way to Write French and Make a New Friend

Sinéad Leleu
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Introduction

In this era of technology, we MFL teachers are spoilt with an excellent array of resource material. Interactive CD-Roms, DVDs, Internet sites … you name it, we use them all. The main aim of all this is that, one day, our pupils will be able to communicate with other MFL speakers through our chosen language. In my own classes, this ‘one day’ is now. This, we do, through pen–pal correspondence.

My experience has shown me that, despite regularly introducing a variety of resources into my classes, rarely a class begins without a pupil asking ‘Have our letters arrived yet?’ ‘Pas encore’ is met with disappointment whereas ‘Oui’ is met with great excitement and delight. My pupils are unwaveringly eager to reply. This may seem like a daunting task to the less-confident or the time-strapped teacher but …

For the teacher, French Pen Pals Made Easy:

◆ Does not require fluency
◆ Is time-saving – little or no preparation is required
◆ Links with the KS3 Programme of Study
◆ Has inherent cross-curricular links to geography, art and ICT
◆ Supplements, consolidates and revises course work

For the pupil, French Pen Pals Made Easy:

◆ Is easy to follow. The method used is gap-filling as opposed to giving pupils the daunting task of beginning with a blank page
◆ Is realistic. The pupil realizes that French can be used for real-life communication and not just in an artificial situation
◆ Instils confidence. They can communicate effectively at a basic level
◆ Helps foster positive attitudes towards foreign language learning
◆ Facilitates intercultural understanding. The pupil can learn about French culture through a French peer
◆ … and of course, it is fun and a wonderful way to make a new friend. (I should know as I have had the same two pen pals for over 25 years!)
Tips for the teacher

Where to find pen pals
1. There are many websites to help you to find a French-speaking class to correspond with, for example:
   - www.epals.com
   - www.globalgateway.org
   - www.Franceworld.com (click on ‘Echange Classes à classes’)
   - www.primlangues.fr (click on 'Correspondre')
   - www.etwinning.net
   - www.ipf.net.au (small fee)

   If you have the option of choosing a country, do not forget other countries where you can find French-speaking schools such as Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Morocco, Tunisia and Canada.

2. If your town is twinned with a French town, you could contact their ‘école primaire’ (ages 6–10 approx) or ‘collège’ (ages 11–14 approx).

Checklist for you and your French-speaking counterpart
1. Confirm with your French-speaking counterpart that your pupils will write in French and decide whether the replies will be in English or French. (They may like to know that French Pen Pals Made Easy can be purchased from Amazon’s French site.)
2. Decide which class will write first.
3. Decide how you are going to pair the pupils. Either one of the teachers decides or the pupils in the class that receives the first letters decide. It is a good idea to make a note of the pairs immediately as some pupils will not remember their pen pal’s name. Unless you find a class with the exact same number of pupils, some pupils will have to write two letters.
4. Discuss the expected frequency of your letters. This depends on the school calendar, workload and enthusiasm. Be careful to decide on realistic deadlines. It is a good idea to take one term at a time.
5. Agree on the themes for the term ahead. Take into consideration seasonal events such as Christmas, Hallowe’en and local festivals.

Before pupils begin
1. Before pupils begin to write a letter, it is paramount to have covered the relevant language orally. Remember: hear it, say it, see it, write it.

2. Introduce letter writing with a sample letter written on the board, chart or overhead projector. You could use the letter for Unit 1, ‘Je me présente’, on page 10; this letter can also be downloaded from our website so you can display it on a whiteboard: www.brilliantpublications.co.uk/pdfs/101010_13.pdf.
Highlight the five main parts of the letter:
- the heading, which includes the town and date
- the greeting
- the body of the letter
- the closing greeting
- the signature

3. Before pupils begin their first letter, explain to them how to use *French Pen Pals Made Easy*:
   - Point out that pupils must first fill in the blanks and circle where there is a choice.
   - Using imaginary details or those of a pupil in the class, go through the letter line by line. Complete and circle where necessary. See what pupils can come up with themselves before referring to the ‘Vocabulaire en plus’ section.
   - Write out the entire letter on the board. Explain to pupils that they will need to write a draft into their French workbooks.
   - Tell pupils that you will then correct their draft letters before they write their final letters.

**Writing your first letter**

1. Having explained how to use *French Pen Pals Made Easy*, give each pupil the French template letter for ‘Je me présente’ (page 10). Depending on the class level and time, some teachers will prefer to only give certain sections of the unit. For example, if your class has a good level of French, you may prefer not to hand out the English template. However, if unfinished letters are given as homework, it is advisable to give all four pages of the unit. As the templates and vocabulary are bilingual, parents/guardians will feel comfortable helping.

2. If you give the English template, point out to your pupils that they are not word-for-word translations. It is the ideas that are translated, eg ‘There are 25 in my class’ is translated to ‘Nous sommes 25 dans ma class’. Translated literally, this would be ‘We are 25 in my class.’

3. Once you have corrected the pupils’ drafts, they should write their letters out neatly to send to their pen pals. Using personalized stationery can help to make their letters special. You can find a variety of stationery online at:
   - www.alapetiteecole.com/papier_a_lettres/
   - www.webmomes.com/pages/lettre.htm
   - www.chezlorry.ca/bricolages.htm

   Allow the pupils to choose for themselves.

4. If pupils wish to include enclosures such as postcards, photos, drawings etc, make sure that they are either stapled or stuck to the letter or that each pupil has their own individual envelope.

**As you move on**

1. As soon as you receive your first replies, get your pupils to stick their letters into their French workbooks or put them into their French folders.

2. *French Pen Pals Made Easy* is flexible so, excepting the first unit (Je me présente), the units may be used in any order.
3. At the beginning of the correspondence, it will be easier for pupils to stick to the template letter. However, as many pupils become more competent, encourage them to change the order of the body of the letter. Weaker pupils can continue to stick to the template letter whereas stronger pupils can use the template letter as a ‘springboard’.

4. You can give the class as a whole a choice of topics to choose from. Alternate the choice between the two corresponding classes.

5. To vary the correspondence, you could use other means such as recorded messages on CD, tape, DVD or video.

6. Do not allow pupils to give their home address or telephone number (or email if you are using snail mail) until the correspondence is well established.

Class projects
Class projects are an excellent way to vary class correspondence. The units ‘Mon école’, ‘J’habite!’ and ‘Noël’ are particularly suitable. The projects can be done in English with an English-French glossary. The class can be divided into small groups and given one section each. Include drawings, photos, posters, videos, DVDs, CDs, brochures etc. A class project can be sent along with individual letters or in the place of individual letters. If you have any festivals particular to where you live, this would also be interesting for your pen pals.

Here are some ideas for things that could be included in the class projects:

Mon école
- our class timetable
- after-school activities
- school dinners
- our uniform
- our school building
- our teachers
- our school crest
- history of our school

J’habite
- history
- a map
- landmark(s)
- festivals and celebrations
- clubs/activities for children
- food specialities
- local heroes and/or famous people
- traditional music
- languages and dialect
Noël
- Christmas food
- Christmas tree and decorations
- Christmas crackers
- A typical Christmas carol
- Christmas card-giving tradition (you can find some card-making ideas at: www.teteamodeler.com/dossier/noel/cartesvoeux.asp)
- Christmas stockings and gift-offering tradition
- 12 Days of Christmas
- Pantomimes

Classroom ideas
1. As soon as you receive your first replies, set up a ‘pen pal corner’ in your classroom. You can include a map of Europe, the world or the country of your pen pals, indicating where they live. You can also make flags of their country and your country. As the correspondence moves along, you can include anything that you or the pupils find interesting such as traditional dishes, school brochures or festivals.

2. To work on oracy skills, pupils can give an oral presentation on their pen pal.

3. As part of art or ICT, pupils can make information sheets based on their pen pals with headings such as:
   - nom
   - âge
   - ville
   - anniversaire
   - couleur des yeux
   - couleur des cheveux
   - frères et sœurs
   - animaux/animal préféré
   - passe-temps
   - couleur préférée
   - musique préférée
   - nourriture préférée
   - boisson préférée
   - matière préférée
   - saison préférée
**Tips for the pupil**

1. Using a model letter, fill in the blanks and circle the words you would like to use. Check out the ‘Vocabulaire en plus’ (Extra vocabulary) section for extra vocabulary. You can keep the English translation nearby to help you.

2. Write out a draft letter (a practice letter). Your teacher will then correct it.

3. Rewrite a final copy of your letter.

4. To make your letter more interesting, use nice stationery and/or decorate your letter with colourful designs and drawings. You can use some of the ideas in the ‘Des idées en plus!’ (Extra ideas!) section.

5. Enclose anything you think may interest your pen pal such as stickers, magazine cuttings, and postcards. Again, you will find ideas in the ‘Des idées en plus!’ (Extra ideas!) section.

6. **Do not** give your home address, telephone number or home email address without the permission of your parents and teacher.

7. Have fun!
Bonjour!

Je m'appelle ________________________________ .

J'ai __________ ans. Quel âge as-tu?

J'habite à ______________ , en / au ___________________ .
Où habites-tu?

Je suis une fille. / Je suis un garçon.

J'aime ____________________ et ___________________ .

Je n'aime pas _________________________________ .

Au revoir!

_____________________________, le ___________________
(ville/village) (date)
Hello!

My name is ________________________________ .

I'm ________ years old. How old are you?

I live in ____________________ , in ____________________ .

Where do you live?

I'm a girl. / I'm a boy.

I like ____________________ and ____________________ .

I don't like _________________________________ .

Bye for now!

______________________________
(your first name)
Vocabulaire en plus
Extra vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>le foot</td>
<td>football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le sport</td>
<td>sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la danse</td>
<td>dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le basket</td>
<td>basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l'équitation</td>
<td>horse riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la natation</td>
<td>swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l'athlétisme</td>
<td>athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la musique</td>
<td>rock music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la musique classique</td>
<td>classical music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l'école</td>
<td>school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le cinéma</td>
<td>the cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>les films</td>
<td>horror movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d'horreurs</td>
<td>fashion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la mode</td>
<td>drama / theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le théâtre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les Simpsons</td>
<td>The Simpsons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le chocolat</td>
<td>chocolate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>les bonbons</td>
<td>sweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le coca</td>
<td>cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le brocoli</td>
<td>broccoli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la pizza</td>
<td>pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>les épinards</td>
<td>spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>les choux de</td>
<td>Brussels sprouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bruxelles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la glace</td>
<td>ice-cream</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Points en plus
Extra points

1. Boy or girl?
Your pen pal may not know from your first name if you are a girl or a boy. So, it’s a good idea to tell them.

2. J’ai 10 ans
Did you notice that, to say how old we are in French, we say ‘J’ai 10 ans’? This literally means ‘I have 10 years’!

3. Le, la, l’, les

In English we say: but in French we say:
I like football.    J’aime le foot.
I like ice-cream.   J’aime la glace.
I like sweets.      J’aime les bonbons.
I like school.      J’aime l’école.

le  la  l’  les  the
Le means ‘the’ before a masculine word such as:
- le fromage the cheese
- le brocoli the broccoli
- le jus d’orange the orange juice

La means ‘the’ before a feminine word such as:
- la glace the ice-cream
- la pomme the apple
- la purée the mashed potatoes

If a word begins with a vowel (a e i o u), you must use l’ instead of le and la. This makes pronunciation easier. So:
- l’école the school
- l’équitation the horse riding
- l’athlétisme the athletics

Les means ‘the’ before a word in the plural such as:
- les pommes the apples
- les chips the crisps
- les bonbons the sweets

Des idées en plus!
Extra ideas!

Include a map of your country showing where you live. Write ‘J’habite ici’ (I live here) and draw an arrow pointing to where you live.

Draw the flag of both your country and your pen pal’s country on your letter page. Alternatively, you could draw a page-size flag of your country or your pen pal’s country and write your letter on the flag!

Use the colour-by-number flags below to help you.

The United Kingdom Flag

Le drapeau tricolore

Draw or include pictures of anything that you think is particular to your country such as a double-decker bus or a red postbox.