
Kurbegov, Eliane. *Must-Know French: 4000 Words That Give You the Power to Communicate.*

New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2006. ISBN: 0-07-14-5644-9. Pp. 254.

This trade paperback is a thematic vocabulary guide described on the cover as providing “hundreds of phrases for business, travel, and everyday conversation.” The target audience includes business people, tourists, students, and other adult learners. The guide is divided into twelve chapters, including themes such as “Work” and “Leisure Time” and situations like “Getting Around” or “Communicating with Others,” with three to six subcategories for each. Under each heading is a list of words and occasional phrases in alphabetical order. English terms are given on the left-hand side in regular type, with their French equivalents on the right in boldface. Nouns are listed with definite articles; adjectives are given in the masculine form, with feminine endings in parentheses. The lists are interspersed with “must-know tips” primarily concerning vocabulary (idioms and false cognates) with an occasional grammatical point (such as the use of the demonstrative adjective *cet*).

At the end of the book are more than one hundred exercises with an answer key.

Exercise types include: matching English with French sentences or translating English sentences into French; putting sentences in a conversation in correct chronological order; fill-in-the-blanks (with choices); multiple choice questions; matching (questions with answers; definitions with words; nouns with same roots as verbs); true/false; *chassez l'intrus*; ranking small to large; identifying categories (e.g., fruit or vegetable?); and identifying antonyms.

The variety and quality of these exercises are strong points of the text. In addition, the vocabulary offered on the topics of distance learning and technology is current and extremely useful (e.g., wireless / *réseau sans fil*). Sections on work and the economy are strong, and readers will find very good content on the topics of crime, politics, the military, terrorism, and ecology (although, while “greenhouse effect / *effet de serre*” is included, there is, oddly, no word provided for “global warming”).

A few minor problems deserve mention. The first chapter, entitled “Communicating with Others,” would be more coherent were the section on

parts of speech set apart as a preliminary chapter. Vocabulary related to computers is included in the “Leisure Time” chapter, not in the technology subsection, and is thus hard to locate. The word for ATM is in the vocabulary on banking section, but is not included in the shopping section, where one finds the outdated item “traveler’s cheques” instead. And, in the section on careers, there is no vocabulary for careers in IT or education. Finally, there are a few errors like the phrase “*Un steack frites, s’il vous plaît!*” listed under *boucherie* (where it would not usually be used), rather than in the section on “Eating Out.”

Somewhat more questionable is the usefulness of the many phrases listed. Some illustrate impersonal structures (“*il a les cheveux châtain et les yeux verts*”), “high-frequency expressions (“*Elle est en pleine forme*”), or colloquial usage (“*Je vais boire un pot avec mes cousins*”), but others seem arbitrary or obscure (“*Sa grande taille le distingue des autres*”; “*Une grande peur la fait défaillir*”). While “*Fais-toi vacciner contre la grippe!*” illustrates vocabulary related to illness, it is doubtful that a learner would ever need to say or understand this phrase in a real-world situation. By contrast, in the section on food, the authors provide the phrase “*Donnez-moi une grappe de raisin,*” which is highly useful for shopping. More examples of this kind would be welcome. Finally, a few signs such as *fermé le dimanche* and *ne pas déranger* are included under various thematic categories, but a separate section on signage would be a valuable feature for the potential tourist.

Overall, this guide is a useful resource for instructors to consult, and for students preparing to write or speak on a particular topic. For the general adult learner traveling or working abroad, it provides a good, varied selection of terms and exercises for vocabulary building. The text is readable, clearly organized, and easy to use.

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Publisher’s Response

We would like to thank Professor Knutson for her informative review of *Must-Know French*. We appreciate her praise of the extensive exercises included and take careful note of her constructive comments for improving the organization of the book, though it can be noted that the detailed table of contents should be of considerable help to first-time users.

The intended audience for this book is broad, ranging from students and travelers to adult learners, as Professor Knutson points out. Therefore, her suggestion to focus all the sample sentences on practical usage with application in real-world situations is a very helpful.

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