

Free Online K-12 French Second Language - Speech / Pronunciation Tools

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In Canada we find many Adventist teachers who teach French as a second language but who don't have the background and support to feel comfortable in their experience. My favorite free web resource for second language instruction is found at this internet address:

<http://www.oddcast.com/sitepal/products/sitepalts.php>

This online resource may be an excellent reference tool to help teachers check their pronunciation before they face their students. It is also a good practice tool.

Even if the primary use of the service (for a cost) is to add a cool speaking character to your web site, the use of the free "text to speech" online feature is what interests me the most. It provides second language students and teachers with an online tool in which they can type a foreign language sentence and then listen to the character pronounce it accurately. Thirteen languages are available, but the ones which will be of greatest interest to Adventist Canadian teachers will be the English and French languages.

I have tested both the English (for ESL students) and French (for FSL students and teachers) and found it to be very accurate in its pronunciation. This is true as long as the text you input is perfectly accurate. In French, this includes the accents that you can first get from a word processor and then copy and paste into the web site's input box. The students find the character and audio response very engaging and entertaining.

Here is an example of how you may want to use the text to speech online utility. Create a student handout of French statements to input onto the web site. Have them practice each statement at least five times. If the handout is sent to your students through email or posted on your web site, they may just copy and paste your French text. This saves them time and eliminates the risk of typing errors. On the other hand, typing the French statements with a word processor is a healthy exercise of its own since it makes students review the spelling of each word and it forces them to practice inserting their French accents.

Pretend that you are a student and try it yourself:

Go to this web address: <http://www.oddcast.com/sitepal/products/sitepalts.php>

1. Click "try now" to use the "text to speech" feature.
2. Select French as a language.
3. Copy (highlight, right click and select copy) the following French statement: J'aime beaucoup parler le Français. C'est très amusant.
4. Click into the "Enter Text" section, and right click to select paste.
5. Select a character (In French I have noticed that the accents of "Bernard" and "Sophie" are often smoother.)
6. Click on the "Say it" button.
7. Listen and repeat (click "Say it") as many times as you want or need.

Technical note: For that sitepal "text to speech" online tool to work, you need the free Flash Player 7 from Macromedia installed on your computer. You may go to this site to download and install it.

http://www.macromedia.com/shockwave/download/download.cgi?P1_Prod_Version=ShockwaveFlash

There are other useful free web sites that can provide some more general instruction in French pronunciation. Here is one of them: <http://french.about.com/library/pronunciation/bl-pronunciation.htm>

Less specialized French (FSL) Teachers and K-12 French (FSL) students can take advantage of this site to listen to the proper basic pronunciation. It also presents basic and more advanced rules governing French language sounds and speech.

Most realize that the best way to learn how to pronounce or speak French is to be completely immersed in a French environment. However, that is not always an option for everyone. These free online tools can help many Canadian FSL teachers gain more confidence while fulfilling their task.