



The French *Household* Field Guide



MY FRENCH HUSBAND

VERSION 2.0 · OCTOBER 2026



She films. He objects.

An American wife and a French husband, in suburban Massachusetts, with three small boys and one running disagreement about butter.

Hi, I'm Elizabeth. American, born here, raised here, fluent in iced coffee, drive-thrus and dinner at 5:30. I hold the camera, I write the narration, and I keep introducing my husband to American institutions. Partly for you. Mostly for me.

This is Sacha. French, from Paris. He dresses for the supermarket the way other men dress for court, and he calls it casual. He isn't performing, and he isn't judging anyone. He really does like it here. He just occasionally meets a gallon of mayonnaise and needs a moment.

We met in New York City, and I eventually brought him home to New England. There are three boys. You will never see their faces. You will, increasingly, hear their opinions.

The whole story: myfrenchhusband.com/about.html · Every day on Instagram: [@myfrenchhusband](https://www.instagram.com/myfrenchhusband)

He didn't bring much luggage. He brought rules.

I'm American. My husband is French, from Paris, and now lives, somehow, in Massachusetts. So I started writing down the things he does that he doesn't consider remarkable at all: why he gets dressed for the supermarket, what goes on a face, when dinner happens, where the cheese goes.

None of it is exotic. Most of it is ordinary French household habit. The annoying part is how much of it turns out to be useful. So here are twenty of those habits, one to a page.

This guide is a little snapshot, for now. We're hoping to grow it into something much bigger, for all of us craving a bit more France.

How to use it

Each page has the rule, why the French do it, and three small things to try this week. Please don't attempt all twenty. Pick one, give it seven days, and see what your household makes of it. If you would like to be told where to start, there's a one-week plan at the back.

Every page also links to the longer field note on our site, where he is quoted at greater length than he would like.

With love, and better butter,

Elizabeth

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Getting dressed is manners.



You dress for the people who will see you.
It's politeness, not fashion.

Why the French do it

He was taught this at seven, by a father who worked in fashion, as a set of rules: the belt matches the shoes, one good thing beats five, and a sweater over the shoulders finishes everything. To him it isn't style. It's just getting dressed. Even for the supermarket.

Try it this week

- 1 Match your belt to your shoes.
- 2 This season, buy one good thing instead of several cheaper ones.
- 3 Get dressed for the supermarket once. Notice whether anything changes.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/why-do-french-men-dress-so-well.html

One feature, never two.



Eyes or lips, not both. Everything else is skin.

Why the French do it

The French aim is to look well, not to look done. So the face gets one thing to say, a red lip or a defined eye, and everything else stays quiet: good skin, a little concealer where it is needed, brows brushed into place. It takes less time in the morning, and there is less to fix at five o'clock.

Try it this week

- 1 Pick your feature this week, lips or eyes. Leave the other bare.
- 2 Swap foundation for concealer, only where you need it.
- 3 Brush your brows up and call it done.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-makeup-look.html

Wash your hair less.



Do less, and never look like you tried. It starts with the shampoo.

Why the French do it

The French rule for hair is restraint. Fewer washes, a gentle shampoo, air-drying when there is time, and a cut that grows out well, so it looks as good on the third day as on the first. A claw clip counts as styling. A little undone is the point, and it gives you back the mornings.

Try it this week

- 1 Add one day between washes this week. Then another.
- 2 Let it air-dry once and see what it does on its own.
- 3 Ask your hairdresser for a cut that grows out well.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-hair-routine.html

Respect the profession.



The doctor, the teacher, the pharmacist, the woman at the town hall. You turn up dressed, because their work deserves it.

Why the French do it

These are the people who hold a town together. The French have a word for what you owe them: *égards*, the consideration due to someone for the work they do. Children call the teacher Madame or Monsieur, never a first name. And you see the doctor dressed, not in gym clothes. It isn't for show. It's a thank-you you can wear.

Try it this week

- 1 Get dressed for your next appointment, even the fifteen-minute one.
- 2 Keep one jacket by the door, for exactly this.
- 3 Teach the children their teacher's title and surname. Use it yourself, too.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Ask the pharmacist.



A French pharmacy isn't for browsing. You describe the problem, and someone qualified hands you one answer.

Why the French do it

The pharmacist is the whole point. The range is narrow on purpose, and you are expected to ask rather than compare forty bottles. What French people buy there is unremarkable: a gentle cleanser, thermal water spray, a repair balm, sunscreen, something for a scraped knee. The famous shelf is, at home, a well-stocked bathroom cupboard.

Try it this week

- 1 Next time, describe the problem to the pharmacist before you pick anything.
- 2 Edit your bathroom shelf to one cleanser, one cream, one sunscreen.
- 3 Read the label before you follow a trend. Biafine is for burns.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-pharmacy-what-to-buy.html

Dinner is at eight.



One dinner, everyone at the table, around eight o'clock. Yes, the children too.

Why the French do it

The trick is the rest of the day. Lunch is a real meal, the children get one snack at four, and nobody eats in between. By eight, everyone at the table is properly hungry, which quietly fixes most of what goes wrong at family dinners.

Try it this week

- 1 Move dinner thirty minutes later than usual, every night this week.
- 2 Nothing to eat after the four o'clock snack. Water is allowed. Sighing is allowed.
- 3 Everyone sits down together and stays for at least half an hour. Even the person who "just needs to check something."

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-dinner-time-explained.html

Courses, even on a Tuesday.



Food arrives in an order: something small, then the main dish, then cheese or fruit. On a weeknight. On purpose.

Why the French do it

An everyday French dinner is modest: soup or raw vegetables, a simple main like an omelette or a gratin, a little cheese, some fruit. The order is what slows it down, and the small portions are what keep it light. It feels fancy. It isn't.

Try it this week

- 1 Serve the vegetables first, on their own, when everyone is hungriest. Sneaky, and it works.
- 2 Bring out the main dish only when the first plates are cleared.
- 3 Finish with fruit. Save the elaborate cooking for Sunday.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/typical-french-dinner-at-home.html

One snack, at four, sitting down.



Le goûter is the one exception: a small, sweet snack for children at about four o'clock. It is sacred.

Why the French do it

It's scheduled, not grazed. Its whole job is to carry a child from the end of school to a late dinner without spoiling it, and it happens once. The clock matters more than what's on the plate.

Try it this week

- 1 Bread or brioche with a few squares of dark chocolate. Chocolate, on bread. This is the system.
- 2 Or plain whole-milk yogurt with honey, and a piece of fruit.
- 3 Serve it once, at the table, at the same time every day.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/what-is-a-gouter.html

Cheese comes after, not before.



Cheese is a course. It arrives after the main dish and before dessert, like a well-mannered guest.

Why the French do it

There's a logic to it: the savoury part of the meal finishes before the sweet part begins. At home, two or three cheeses are plenty, served at room temperature, with bread.

Try it this week

- 1 Take the cheese off the appetizer board. I know. Be brave.
- 2 Choose three: one soft, one hard, one blue or goat.
- 3 Out of the fridge an hour before dinner. Bread, not crackers.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-cheese-course-explained.html

Have an apéritif.



A drink and something small before dinner, at a set time, with people you like.

Why the French do it

This is not snacking. *L'apéro* is a scheduled little party that opens the evening. The classic thing to eat with it has three ingredients and involves no cooking at all.

Try it this week

- 1 On Friday, put out radishes, cold unsalted butter and flaky salt.
- 2 Drag the radish through the butter, dip it in the salt, eat. Repeat.
- 3 Give it half an hour. Then have dinner.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/radishes-with-butter-french-snack.html

One menu for everyone.



Children eat what the adults eat, just smaller. There is no second dinner, and no short-order cook.

Why the French do it

In France, taste is treated as a skill you teach, not a preference you cater to. From daycare on, children are served the same meals as grown-ups, with one rule: you taste everything.

Try it this week

- 1 Retire from cooking a separate meal for the children.
- 2 Serve everyone the same dish. Make theirs smaller.
- 3 One bite is required. No commentary afterwards, from anyone.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-kids-eat-what-adults-eat.html

Bedtime follows dinner.



Dinner, wash, one story, lights out. The same order, every night.

Why the French do it

French children usually go to bed between eight and nine, straight from the table. The routine is calm because it's never up for debate. It's presented as a fact, like the weather. And afterwards, the evening belongs to the grown-ups.

Try it this week

- 1 Pick your four steps and keep their order for seven nights.
- 2 Offer no menu of options. One story means one story.
- 3 Don't apologise for wanting your evening back.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-kids-bedtime-routine.html

Let them go ahead of you.



Independence is expected early. It's ordinary, not a reward.

Why the French do it

French children are trusted sooner with small things: walking a familiar route, buying the bread, sitting through a grown-up meal without being entertained. The difference is less about danger than about what each culture thinks a parent is for.

Try it this week

- 1 Hand over one small errand a week: paying at the bakery, ordering their own food.
- 2 Take them to one restaurant meal with no screen.
- 3 Let them be bored at the table. It's a skill. So is not rescuing them.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-kids-walk-to-school-alone.html

Lunch is a lesson.



At school, French children sit down to four courses and stay for at least half an hour. Four. Courses.

Why the French do it

A vegetable starter, a hot main dish, cheese or yogurt, and fruit. The menu is published in advance and parents read it closely. Lunch is treated as part of a child's education, and eating fast is not considered a talent.

Try it this week

- 1 Make one weekend lunch a sit-down meal in four small courses.
- 2 In the lunchbox: a vegetable, a main, a dairy, a fruit.
- 3 Read the school menu together and talk about it.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-school-lunch-menu.html

Fourteen is a good mark.



French schools grade out of twenty, and nobody expects twenty. Perfect is not the assignment.

Why the French do it

Anything from about 12 up is respectable, 14 is strong, and 16 is excellent. The honour for a 12 at the *baccalauréat* is *assez bien*: fairly good. There is an old classroom saying that 20 is for God and 19 is for the teacher. It sounds severe. It also means a child learns early that good is good, and perfect was never the point.

Try it this week

- 1 Praise the progress, not the perfect score.
- 2 Ask what they learned before you ask what they got.
- 3 Next time something is good, say so. Then stop there.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/french-grading-system-explained.html

Say bonjour first.



Greet before anything else. In France it is very nearly the law.

Why the French do it

French politeness lives in the greeting, not in friendly chat. *Bonjour* on the way in, *merci* and *au revoir* on the way out. Skipping the first one is a real offence. The warmth isn't missing. It's just saved for people you actually know.

Try it this week

- 1 In France: say bonjour on entering every shop, before you ask for anything.
- 2 At home: greet the person before you make the request.
- 3 Teach the children the three words, in order.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/why-dont-french-people-make-small-talk.html

Slippers, perhaps. Never by order.



France has no shoes-off rule. Many people change into slippers. Guests are not asked to.

Why the French do it

Unlike Japan or Scandinavia, French homes sit somewhere in the middle. *Les pantoufles* are for your own comfort, and asking a visitor to take off their shoes can come across as a little fussy.

“*They are my shoes.*”

HIM

Try it this week

- 1 Keep a pair of house slippers by the door, for yourself.
- 2 Let guests decide for themselves.
- 3 Stop having the argument. Both sides are certain, in every country, in every marriage.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/do-french-people-wear-shoes-in-the-house.html

Close the shutters.



Shutters closed by mid-morning, windows open at night. A French house cools itself before it asks for help.

Why the French do it

About a quarter of French homes have air conditioning, against roughly nine in ten in America. The houses were built for it: thick walls, shutters closed before the sun arrives, windows thrown open once the evening cools. It is no match for a real heatwave, and France buys more air conditioners every summer. On an ordinary warm day, it works beautifully.

Try it this week

- 1 Close the blinds on the sunny side before ten.
- 2 Open the windows wide once the evening cools. Make a draught.
- 3 Try one warm day with the thermostat a few degrees higher. Report back.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/why-dont-the-french-have-air-conditioning.html

Decorate once a year.



Christmas gets a tree. The rest of the year, the house just looks like itself.

Why the French do it

A French home has no autumn look, no Halloween aisle and no storage bin for each season. Christmas is done properly: a tree, often a *crèche*, and lights in the street put up by the town. The rest of the year, the house changes with what is in the fruit bowl. His position is that a home should not announce what month it is.

Try it this week

- 1 Choose one thing you love and leave it out all year.
- 2 Let the fruit bowl do the seasons: apples now, clementines in December.
- 3 Give the tree your full attention in December. It has earned it.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/why-americans-decorate-for-every-season.html

Take the holiday.



Time off is taken, in full, and nobody apologises for it.

Why the French do it

French employees are entitled to five weeks of paid leave by law, on top of public holidays. In August the bakery closes, tapes a handwritten note to the door with the date it will reopen, and everyone agrees that is enough.

Try it this week

- 1 Book your time off now, before the year fills up.
- 2 Take at least one full week in a single block.
- 3 Write an out-of-office with your return date and nothing else. No apologies.

The full field note: myfrenchhusband.com/how-much-vacation-do-french-people-get.html

One week, one rule a day.

If twenty feels like a lot (it is), start here.

Seven small changes, in an order that makes each one a little easier than the last.

<i>Monday</i>	Get dressed for the supermarket. Notice what changes. <i>Rule 1</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	One feature, lips or eyes. Leave the other bare. <i>Rule 2</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	Edit the bathroom shelf: one cleanser, one cream, one sunscreen. <i>Rule 5</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	Move dinner thirty minutes later. Everyone at the table. <i>Rule 6</i>
<i>Friday</i>	An apéritif before dinner: radishes, butter, salt. <i>Rule 10</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	Serve the vegetables first, on their own. <i>Rule 7</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	A long lunch, in courses, with cheese before dessert. <i>Rule 9</i>

At the end of the week, keep the two your household liked best and let the rest go. No guilt. Very French.

Getting ready, the French way.



Five of the twenty rules live at the mirror and in the wardrobe. Here they are, in the order of a morning.

Skin **Cleanse, treat, moisturize, protect.** *One product each.*
From the pharmacy, not the beauty aisle. Rule 5.

Face **One feature, never two.** *Lips or eyes.*
Concealer only where you need it, brows brushed up. Rule 2.

Hair **Wash it less.** *A claw clip counts.*
Air-dry when there is time, and a cut that grows out well. Rule 3.

Dressed **The belt matches the shoes.** *One good thing beats five.*
Dressed for the people who will see you, the supermarket included. Rules 1 and 4.

The shelf

One cleanser, one cream, one sunscreen. A thermal water spray and a repair balm if you like, and something for a scraped knee. That is the famous French pharmacy, at home.

Three tools on the site do this for you: three questions each, and your routine back. [Your French Pharmacy Skincare Routine](#) · [Your French Makeup Look](#) · [Your French Hair Routine](#)

BUILD MY ROUTINE

The tool: myfrenchhusband.com/french-pharmacy-routine.html

What's for dinner? It depends on the day.



In France the day of the week decides half the menu. This is the week as it runs in our house.

<i>Monday</i>	Hachis Parmentier <i>Monday is for leftovers.</i> Or, in twenty minutes: Croque-Monsieur. No meat or fish: Omelette aux Fines Herbes.
<i>Tuesday</i>	Quiche Lorraine <i>Tuesday is a tart.</i> Or, in twenty minutes: Salade Lyonnaise. No meat or fish: Tarte à la Tomate et à la Moutarde.
<i>Wednesday</i>	Galettes Complètes <i>Wednesday belongs to the children.</i> Or, in twenty minutes: Coquillettes Jambon-Comté. No meat or fish: Galettes Épinards, Œuf et Chèvre.
<i>Thursday</i>	Steak au Poivre <i>Thursday is bistro night.</i> Or, in twenty minutes: Moules Marinières. No meat or fish: Soupe à l'Oignon Gratinée.
<i>Friday</i>	Cabillaud Rôti au Chorizo <i>Friday is fish.</i> Or, in twenty minutes: Saumon en Papillote. No meat or fish: Soupe au Pistou.
<i>Saturday</i>	Magret de Canard au Miel <i>Saturday, we have people over.</i> Or, in twenty minutes: Apéro Dînatoire, Brie au Four. No meat or fish: La Ratatouille de sa Mère.
<i>Sunday</i>	Poulet Rôti du Dimanche <i>Sunday is roast chicken.</i> Or, in twenty minutes: Œufs à la Coque, Mouillettes. No meat or fish: Gratin Dauphinois.

Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday are real French habits. The rest is his. Three of the recipes follow. All twenty-one are on the site, where he scales them to your table and picks the wine.

TELL ME WHAT TO COOK

The tool: myfrenchhusband.com/whats-for-dinner-the-french-way.html

His mother's cod, with chorizo.



Friday is fish. An old Catholic habit that outlived the churchgoing.

35 MIN · SERVES 4

You need

- | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| 4 | cod fillets, about 160 g each | 12 slices | cured chorizo, cut thin |
| 600 g | small potatoes | 60 g | butter |
| 1 | lemon | 2 tbsp | capers |
| 1 bunch | parsley | | |

How

- 1 Steam or boil the potatoes until tender, about 20 minutes.
- 2 Salt the cod lightly and lay the chorizo slices on top, overlapping. Roast on an oiled tray at 200°C / 400°F for 10 to 12 minutes.
- 3 Melt the butter until it smells nutty. Off the heat, add lemon juice, capers and parsley.
- 4 Spoon the butter over the fish and potatoes.

His mother's touch. She lays thin slices of chorizo on top of the cod before it goes in the oven. It crisps, and gives the fish a little smoky kick.

“Fish is done when you think it needs two more minutes.”

The wine. Muscadet or Picpoul de Pinet, very cold. With the chorizo, a dry rosé works too. **With it.** The potatoes, and more lemon.

For another number of people, or to print it: myfrenchhusband.com/whats-for-dinner-the-french-way.html

Coquillettes jambon-Comté.



Wednesday belongs to the children: French schools have long kept the afternoon free. So they choose dinner. They choose this. Every time.

15 MIN · SERVES 4

You need

350 g coquillettes or small elbow pasta

4 slices ham, torn

120 g grated Comté or Emmental

30 g butter

2 tbsp crème fraîche

How

- 1 Cook the pasta in salted water. Keep a cup of the water.
- 2 Drain. Back in the pan with butter, cream and a splash of the water.
- 3 Stir in the cheese until glossy, then the ham. Pepper.

“Every French adult was raised on this. Michelin chefs now charge thirty euros for it.”

The wine. Water for them. A glass of Jura Chardonnay for you. **With it.** Nothing, it is complete. Though some people add cold ketchup on top, straight from the fridge.

For another number of people, or to print it: myfrenchhusband.com/whats-for-dinner-the-french-way.html

A baked brie for the apéritif.

Rule 10, made easy. Drinks that quietly become dinner, around one warm, gooey cheese.

25 MIN · SERVES 4



You need

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1 small whole brie, about 250 g | 1 tbsp honey |
| 2 sprigs thyme | 30 g walnuts |
| 2 cheeses for the board: one hard, one goat | 1 saucisson sec |
| 1 bunch radishes | 60 g salted butter |
| 2 baguettes | 1 jar cornichons |

How

- 1 Score the top of the brie in a criss-cross. Put it in a small oven dish with the thyme and a spoon of honey.
- 2 Bake at 180°C / 350°F for 15 minutes, until it gives when you press the middle. Scatter the walnuts over.
- 3 Meanwhile take the other cheeses out, slice the saucisson thin, and wash the radishes, leaving a little stem on.
- 4 Put the hot brie in the middle of the table with torn baguette for dipping, and everything else on boards around it.

“In France this is usually a Camembert, baked in its wooden box. A brie works. Do not call it a charcuterie board.”

The wine. Crémant to start, then whatever the guests brought. **With it.** Nothing. This is dinner.

For another number of people, or to print it: myfrenchhusband.com/whats-for-dinner-the-french-way.html

He has been grading me for years. Your turn.

Thirteen quizzes and adventures. About a minute each, and one verdict. He wrote the answers, so you have been warned.



How Parisian Are You?



Is Your Closet French or American?



Could You Survive a French Dinner Party?



Your First Dinner with French In-Laws



How French Is Your Thanksgiving?



How American Are You?



How French Is Your Husband?



Do You Parent French or American?



Were You a French or an American Teenager?



How American Is Your Halloween?



Your First Day in Paris



Your First Day in New York



Chat Parisien or American Cat?

TAKE A QUIZ

All thirteen, and the tools: myfrenchhusband.com/quiz.html

A few questions. One answer.

Seven small tools on the site. Four ask about you and hand back a routine or a dinner. Three settle an argument in ten seconds flat.



Your French Makeup Look

One feature, never two. What to wear and how to put it on.



Your French Pharmacy Skincare Routine

Cleanse, treat, moisturize, protect. Four steps for your skin.



Your French Hair Routine

Wash less. The rest, in four steps.



What's for Dinner? The French Way

The day, the table, the time. One dish, the recipe and the wine.



Where Is Your Paris?

Tell him where you live. He names your arrondissement.



French Grade Converter

What a 14 out of 20 means in American.



How Much Do I Tip?

Paris or New York: restaurant, café or taxi.

SEE ALL THE QUIZZES AND TOOLS

Everything in one place: myfrenchhusband.com/quiz.html

He is refining me. I am ruining him.

My French Husband is me, an American wife, documenting my French husband in New England, in short films, one aisle at a time. This guide is the practical part. The rest lives on the site.

The Show

Where to start: who we are, the latest films and the letter.

Episodes

Every film so far, from the coffee creamer aisle to the Costco saga.

The Journal

Field notes on French and American life: style, food, family and the gap between.

Recipes

A dinner for every day of the week, and the everyday French classics.

The Quizzes and Tools

Thirteen short tests and adventures, and seven tools. He wrote the answers.

Ask Him

One question, one short ruling.

Le Bulletin

Our letters: the stories behind the films, and his verdict.

About Us

How we met, how this started, and Loulou, who was here first.

LE BULLETIN

The good stuff doesn't fit in a reel.

*You are on the list for our letters. They
are letters, not broadcasts, and we read
every reply. Tell us which rule you
tried, how it went, and what you
would like in the next edition.*

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MYFRENCHHUSBAND.COM