



## *Table of Contents*

<b>Preface:</b> Diction, a Gateway to Artistic Singing; Acknowledgments . . . . .	4
<b>Part 1: Introduction</b>	
<b>Chapter 1:</b> Phonetic Concepts . . . . .	5
Diction Concepts . . . . .	6
Phonetics . . . . .	6
Orthography . . . . .	7
Vowels . . . . .	8
Diphthongs . . . . .	10
Semivowels . . . . .	10
Consonants . . . . .	10
Syllables . . . . .	12
<b>Chapter 2:</b> The French Language . . . . .	13
The Roots of Modern French . . . . .	14
The Unity of the French Language . . . . .	16
<b>Chapter 3:</b> Characteristic Patterns and Sounds in French . . . . .	17
The Neutral Sound . . . . .	18
Comparing French to Other Languages . . . . .	18
A Standard for Classical French . . . . .	19
R in Sung French . . . . .	19
Mute E's in Sung French . . . . .	19
The Alphabet . . . . .	20
Diacritics . . . . .	21
Syllabication . . . . .	22
Vowels . . . . .	22
Consonants . . . . .	24
Final Consonant Letters . . . . .	25
Plurals Ending in S . . . . .	26
Homonyms . . . . .	26
Syllable Stress . . . . .	27
Connections Between Words . . . . .	27
Nasality . . . . .	28
Capitalization in French Titles . . . . .	28
<b>Part 2: The Sounds of French</b>	
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Oral Vowels . . . . .	29
Practicing French Vowels . . . . .	29
Bright Vowels: /i e ε a/ . . . . .	30
Dark Vowels: /u o o α/ . . . . .	38
Mixed Vowels: /y ø œ ə/ . . . . .	43
Silent E . . . . .	50
Vowel Harmonization . . . . .	50
<b>Chapter 5:</b> Nasal Vowels . . . . .	51
Nasal Vowels in IPA . . . . .	52
Spellings That Show Nasalization . . . . .	52
Practicing Nasal Vowels . . . . .	53
Nasal Vowels: /ã ě õ œ / . . . . .	53
Exceptions to Nasalization . . . . .	58

<b>Chapter 6:</b>	Semivowels . . . . .	59
	Semivowel: /j/ . . . . .	60
	Distinguishing /i/ from /j/ . . . . .	61
	Semivowel: /w/ . . . . .	62
	Distinguishing /u/ from /w/ . . . . .	63
	Semivowel: /ɥ/ . . . . .	64
	Distinguishing /y/ from /ɥ/ . . . . .	65
	A Semivowel at the End of a Word . . . . .	65
	A Review of French Vowels and Semivowels . . . . .	66
<b>Chapter 7:</b>	Consonants . . . . .	67
	French Consonant Phonemes . . . . .	68
	Silent Consonant Letters . . . . .	69
	Soft and Hard Pronunciations . . . . .	69
	Dentalization . . . . .	69
	Lack of Aspiration . . . . .	70
	Geminated Consonants . . . . .	70
	Consonant Clusters . . . . .	70
	Nasal Consonants: /m n ɲ/ . . . . .	71
	The Lateral Consonant /l/ . . . . .	74
	The Trill Consonant /r r̄/ . . . . .	76
	Stop Consonants /p b t d k g/ . . . . .	77
	Fricative Consonants /f v s z ʒ ʒ̣/ . . . . .	86
<b>Chapter 8:</b>	How Words Link . . . . .	93
	Vowel-to-Consonant Links . . . . .	93
	Consonant-to-Consonant Links . . . . .	93
	Vowel-to-Vowel Links . . . . .	94
	Consonant-to-Vowel Links, Semivowel-to-Vowel Links . . . . .	95
	Contractions . . . . .	95
	Unwritten Elisions . . . . .	96
<b>Chapter 9:</b>	Liaisons . . . . .	97
	Liaisons and Formality . . . . .	98
	Conditions of Liaison . . . . .	98
	The First Condition . . . . .	98
	The Second Condition . . . . .	99
	The Third Condition . . . . .	99
	Special Cases: Idiomatic Expressions . . . . .	105
	Special Cases: Words With R . . . . .	106
	Other Special Cases . . . . .	106
	Vowels That Change in Liaison . . . . .	107
	Breath and Liaisons . . . . .	108
	Some Controversial Liaisons . . . . .	108
<b>Chapter 10:</b>	Singing French Verse . . . . .	111
<b>Part III: Supplements</b>		
	French Songs: “ <i>Alouette</i> ,” “ <i>French Church Bells</i> ,” “ <i>Après de ma blonde</i> ,” “ <i>Il est né, le divin enfant</i> ” . . . . .	114
	Numbers . . . . .	117
	Summary of Final Consonants . . . . .	119
	Bibliography . . . . .	123
	Index to Definitions of Terms . . . . .	124
	Index to Spellings . . . . .	125
	Complete IPA Chart . . . . .	126
	Phonemes of French . . . . .	127

## Part I: Introduction

# Chapter 1: Phonetic Concepts



To sing well in French is an essential part of a classical singer's training because of the wealth of great songs and operas France has produced. We aspire to sing in French as beautifully as a native speaker of French, a FRANCOPHONE. To do so, we must gain conscious control of many factors that come automatically to a native French person. That is why a native speaker of English, called an ANGLOPHONE, needs to learn certain new concepts and vocabulary about diction.

This chapter presents basic concepts and traces connections between them. Whatever is not clear to you at the first reading will become clear as your work progresses. Each new term is printed in SMALL CAPITALS when it is defined for the first time, making it easy to find later for review.

### Diction Concepts

DICTION means, for singers, the art of making the texts we sing clear to our listeners.

PRONUNCIATION involves choosing the best, most correct sound of a word, the one that is used by educated speakers and verified by dictionaries. Classical singers use a style of pronunciation that is different from ordinary speech.

ARTICULATION means forming the sound correctly and efficiently with a minimum of physical tension. The lips, teeth, tongue and soft palate are ARTICULATORS.

And the concept of diction has to include EXPRESSION, because our performance is not complete until we make an emotional contact with our listeners.

### Phonetics

PHONETICS<sup>1</sup>, the science of speech sounds, provides a great deal of useful information for singers. PHONETICIANS, the scholars of phonetics, are trained to analyze the sounds of any language, even one that has never been written.

In analyzing languages and recording their observations, phoneticians use the INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (IPA). In the IPA, one written symbol, and only one, stands for each speech sound in a language, regardless of how that language is written. The complete IPA contains both letters from our alphabet and symbols borrowed from other languages. It also includes additional markings called DIACRITICS that can be added to the symbols to account for small adjustments, such as a particular individual's tongue position. The International Phonetic Association recognizes enough symbols to record any speech sound that a human being could possibly produce. A chart of the complete IPA, containing far more symbols than we need for European languages, is found on page 126.

PHONEMES are speech sounds that contribute to meaning. No language uses all of the possible speech sounds that human beings can produce. Every language selects the sounds that it needs to distinguish between words. In order to identify which phonemes a particular language uses, phoneticians study MINIMAL PAIRS, words that differ from each other only by a single phoneme.

Here is how such a study works: Two words that are the same except for their initial consonants, “ten” and “den,” are a minimal pair, in IPA, /tɛn/ and /dɛn/. Since the words have different meanings, /t/ and /d/ must be separate phonemes. Sounds that produce a contrast in meaning are said to be contrastive.

On the other hand, we might hear two persons say the word “debt,” one with only oral resonance, /dɛt/, and the other with a nasal tone, /dɛ̃t/. Since we understand both of them equally well, we know that oral /ɛ/ and nasalized /ɛ̃/ are merely individual variations, not separate phonemes. Pronunciations that differ from each other but are not contrastive are called ALLOPHONES<sup>2</sup>. But while /ɛ/ and /ɛ̃/ are allophones in English, they are contrastive phonemes in French, as is proved by the minimal pair *mais* /mɛ/ (but) and *main* /mɛ̃/ (hand).

Some customs to observe when writing in the IPA:

- Writing a word or text in the IPA is called transcribing it; the result is called an IPA transcription.
- Within the normal context of a sentence, enclose IPA symbols in slashes, / /, or square brackets [ ].
- Slashes or brackets are not needed for individual words within a transcription.
- IPA transcriptions contain only what can be heard, therefore, silent letters are omitted.
- Punctuation is not used.
- Capitalization is not used because upper case letters may be IPA symbols with special sounds.

<sup>1</sup>From Greek *phōnē*, sound, voice.

<sup>2</sup>From Greek *allos*, other.