

BRISTOL FRENCH CIRCLE – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q I have heard that everything is done in French – is this true?

A We do try to talk French all the time, yes! So we use French for the information announcements before the talks, the talks themselves, and most of the chat at the beginning and end of sessions. That said, if you're stuck on how to say something, of course you can talk in English!

Q I feel shy about trying to speak French in public – will I be made to speak?

A You will not be put on the spot, tested or embarrassed in any way – and you will find plenty of other members who do not necessarily feel very confident about talking in public. If you prefer to listen to the talks and not engage in much chat before and afterwards, that is fine. The only time when we would hope that you would at least try to have a go is at social evenings and conversation evenings, where the whole point is to talk to other members.

Q My French is rusty and I'm a bit embarrassed to come along to a society where everyone's level of French is very high.

A The level of French varies quite widely across the membership, nobody is perfect, and nobody is out to 'score points' against other members. The spirit of the Circle is one of encouragement and friendship.

Q I haven't used French since I was at school. Should I take a refresher course before coming to the French Circle?

A If you have some experience in the language you will probably get back into the swing of it quickly once you start using it again. If you want to supplement it with a course, then the Alliance Française offers courses at various levels of ability. If you are able to get along early to the French Circle meeting, you can participate in an informal teaching session which is held before the main programme commences. This is not a structured course; we study pronunciation, idioms and points of grammar in a light-hearted class.

Q I am a poor French speaker, slow and inexpert. I have to plan each sentence in my head before I open my mouth and tend to sit there dumbly for a while if someone speaks to me in French, while I try and work out what they have said to me. I would like to become more fluent although I get the impression that your group consists of people who are either fluent or at least have a good conversational grasp. I wouldn't want to come along and just be bewildered for the evening. Perhaps you could give me a candid answer as to whether or not your group caters for people like me?

A Some members are very fluent indeed, others far less so, and people tend to fit in at a level where they feel comfortable. We do not offer formal tuition in French, nor one to one conversational practice, so if that is what you need, you would need to look elsewhere. What we do offer is a series of interesting talks by native or bilingual speakers, which offer the opportunity to listen to excellent grammatical and

idiomatic French and absorb vocabulary, structures and pronunciation. The conversation and social evenings give members a greater opportunity to put their speaking skills into practice, and here you will always find dictionaries at the ready and people who are keen to help. Why not come along just once to see how it goes – you can always ring Charlotte Taylor, the President, or Colin Hawkins, the Membership Secretary, for advice on a good evening to pick for your first visit.

Q I hear that foreign language societies are often very highbrow – I’m interested in learning everyday French.

A If you look at our programme you will see that we have a wide range of speakers who cover a great variety of different subjects. Our conversation evenings and dinners are very pleasant occasions where we chat in French on topics of interest and of our own choosing.

Q I would like to see what the French Circle is like before I join.

A You are very welcome to come as a visitor and pay £2 per evening. If you decide after a few visits that you would like to become a member, your contributions to date will be credited against your membership fee of £20.

Q How many people come to meetings?

A We usually have between 40 and 55 members at meetings. Our very enjoyable French dinners, held outside the programme of talks, usually attract 20–25 members and friends.

Q Can I really expect to see an improvement in my level of French listening and speaking?

A This will depend on your current standard of French and on how much time and effort you put into your language work, but ‘c’est en forgeant qu’on devient forgeron’! The Circle gives its members the opportunity to use French regularly, which at the very least keeps us on our toes, and conversing with others will build up a degree of confidence which is unobtainable using self-study methods alone. Some members bring a notebook to meetings so they can jot down new words or expressions they want to check, and there is always an opportunity to ask for help.