

FRENCH PREPOSITIONS «CHEZ» VS «À»



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In French, the preposition “chez” is unique because it doesn’t have a direct equivalent in English. English speakers often use “at,” “in,” or “to” to convey location, but in French, chez goes beyond these meanings. It’s used in specific contexts to express being at someone’s place, within certain businesses, or among certain groups of people.

In contrast, à is more flexible and often translates directly to “at” or “in.” Knowing when to use chez rather than à can make your French sound more fluent and natural.

Using “Chez” to Indicate Someone’s Place

In French, chez is the go-to preposition to say you’re at, going to, or coming from someone’s place, whether that’s a friend, relative, or any person.

French: Nous restons chez nos amis ce soir.

English: We’re staying at our friends’ place tonight.

French: Elle est rentrée chez elle.

English: She went back to her place (or home).

In these cases, chez replaces the need for possessives (like “Marie’s” or “our friends”) and spatial prepositions (like “to” or “at”).

Using “Chez” with Certain Businesses or Professionals

When referring to certain types of businesses or offices (often where professionals work), chez conveys the idea of being at a person’s professional space. This is a common structure in French that doesn’t have a direct translation in English, where we would instead use "at."

French: Il est allé chez le médecin.

English: He went to the doctor’s office.

French: Nous devons passer chez le boulanger.

English: We need to stop at the bakery (or at the baker’s).

Using chez here emphasizes the personal or small-business nature of the space. You would not use chez with a large place like a supermarket; for those, à or dans is preferred.

Using “Chez” with Groups or Organizations

Chez can also refer to being in the context of a particular group, culture, company, or organization.

French: Chez les Français, le repas est un moment de partage.

English: Among French people, meals are a time for sharing.

French: Elle a trouvé un stage chez Apple.

English: She found an internship at Apple.

This usage conveys the sense of belonging to or being associated with that group, culture, or company, often implying a sense of familiarity.

Using “À” for Location Without a Personal Connection

When referring to a general place or destination where there isn't a personal connection or context, à is more appropriate. À is used with cities, general places, and locations without the personal, possessive context that chez conveys.

French: Nous allons à Paris demain.

English: We're going to Paris tomorrow.

French: Je suis à l'école.

English: I am at school.

French: Elle dîne au restaurant.

English: She's dining at the restaurant.

In these cases, there is no implied sense of belonging or personhood associated with the place, so à works better than chez.

Summary of Rules

Use chez for someone's place or home: chez Marie (at Marie's place).

Use chez for certain businesses or professionals: chez le médecin (at the doctor's office).

Use chez with groups, organizations, or cultural contexts: chez les Français (among the French people).

Use à for general locations or impersonal places: à Paris, au restaurant (at/in Paris, at the restaurant).

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