

EN FAIT AU FAIT DE FAIT



Understanding En fait vs. Au fait vs. De fait

French has several expressions that use the word *fait* (“fact” or “done”), but their meanings are quite different. These three are often confusing: *en fait* vs. *au fait* vs. *de fait*.

In this lesson, we are focusing on *fait* as a noun, which means “fact” or “thing done.” This is very different from *fait* as the past participle of the verb *faire* (“to do/make”).

Important pronunciation rule:

When *fait* is a noun, always pronounce the “t” at the end.
When *fait* is the past participle of *faire*, the “t” is silent.

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Examples:

Noun:

C'est un fait intéressant.

It's an interesting fact. (pronounce the "t")

Past participle:

Il a fait ses devoirs.

He did his homework. (do not pronounce the "t")

En fait vs. Au fait vs. De fait all use *fait* as a noun, so remember to pronounce the "t."

EN FAIT — “Actually” / “In fact”

This is very commonly used in spoken French. It's used to clarify, correct, or emphasize something. Think of it as “bringing a fact into the conversation.”

Examples:

En fait, je ne suis pas libre demain.

Actually, I'm not free tomorrow.

Tu pensais qu'il allait pleuvoir? En fait, il fait soleil toute la journée.

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You thought it was going to rain? In fact, it's sunny all day.

En fait, ce film est meilleur que je ne le pensais.
Actually, this movie is better than I thought.

Use *en fait* when you want to clarify or correct information.

AU FAIT — “By the way” or “Up to date / Informed”

This expression has two uses:

“By the way”: Adding information

Used at the start of a sentence to bring up a related point.

Examples:

Au fait, tu as vu mon e-mail ?

By the way, did you see my email?

Je pars en vacances demain. Au fait, tu peux arroser mes plantes?

I'm going on vacation tomorrow. By the way, can you water my plants?

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“Up to date / Informed”: Usually with *être*

Être au fait de quelque chose = “to be knowledgeable about” or “to be well-informed about.”

Examples:

Il est au fait des dernières nouvelles.
He’s up to date on the latest news.

Elle n’est pas au fait des règles de l’entreprise.
She’s not familiar with the company rules.

DE FAIT — “As a matter of fact” / “In practice”

More formal, mostly in written French (essays, articles, reports). This expression indicates a result of a fact or a state of affairs.

Examples:

La loi interdit cette pratique; de fait, elle a presque disparu.
The law prohibits this practice; as a matter of fact, it has almost disappeared.

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Personne ne s'y est opposé; de fait, la décision a été acceptée par tous.

No one opposed it; consequently, the decision was accepted by everyone.

en fait	actually, in fact	<u>En fait</u> , je ne peux pas venir.	<u>Actually</u> , I can't come.
au fait (by the way)	by the way	<u>Au fait</u> , tu as vu mon message?	<u>By the way</u> , did you see my message?
au fait (knowledge)	to be up to speed	Il est <u>au fait</u> de la situation.	He's <u>aware</u> of the situation.
de fait	as a matter of fact, in practice	<u>De fait</u> , le projet a échoué.	<u>As a matter of fact</u> , the project failed.

Things to remember about en fait vs. au fait vs. de fait

En fait = “in fact” = clarify or correct

Au fait = “by the way” OR “knowledgeable/familiar with facts”

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De fait = “due to fact” = formal, logical consequence

Pronounce the “t” in fait because it’s a noun

Past participle fait (from faire) - the “t” is silent.

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