

# Connaître vs Savoir



Both *connaître* and *savoir* translate as “to know” in English, but they are used in very different ways. The key difference is what kind of “knowing” you’re talking about.

## 1. Connaître vs Savoir - The Big Difference

Verb	Used for	Think of it as
<b>connaître</b>	people, places, things	familiarity
<b>savoir</b>	facts, information, skills	knowledge

If you know, or if you’re familiar with a person, a place, or thing, use *connaître*.

If you know a fact, some information, or how to do something, use *savoir*.

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## 2. Connaître - To be familiar with

Use *connaître* with nouns (never a verb).

### People

- Je **connais** Marie.
- I **know** Marie. (I've met her.)
  
- Nous **connaissons** bien ce professeur.
- We **know** this teacher well. (We've met him.)

### Places

- Il **connait** Paris.
- He **knows** Paris. (He's been there.)
  
- Tu **connais** ce restaurant?
- Do you **know** this restaurant? (Have you been there?)

### Things / concepts

- Je **connais** ce livre.
- I'm **familiar** with this book. (I've read it.)
  
- Elle **connait** la vérité.
- She **knows** the truth. (she's familiar with it.)

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If you can replace “know” with “*be familiar with*” in English, **connaître** is usually the right choice.

### 3. **Savoir - To know a fact or information**

Use *savoir* when talking about knowledge, information, or certainty.

#### **Facts**

- Je **sais** la réponse.
- I **know** the answer. (I know information.)
  
- Il **sait** où elle habite.
- He **knows** where she lives. (He knows a fact.)
  
- Nous **savons** que c’est difficile.
- We **know** that it’s difficult. (We know this information.)

#### **Questions and clauses**

- Tu **sais** pourquoi il est en retard?
- Do you **know** why he’s late? (Do you know this information?)
  
- Je ne **sais** pas si elle viendra.

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- I don't **know** if she'll come. (I don't know this information.)

**Savoir** is very often followed by:

- a question word (où, quand, pourquoi, comment...)
- que, si, or ce que

#### 4. **Savoir + infinitive - Knowing how to do something**

This is a *big one* for English speakers.

Use **savoir** (not connaître!) when you mean “to know how to” do something.

- Je **sais** conduire.
- I **know how** to drive.
  
- Elle **sait** nager.
- She **knows how** to swim.
  
- Tu **sais** faire un gâteau?
- Do you **know how** to make a cake?

#### 5. **Common tricky contrasts**

Here are some pairs that really show the difference:

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- Je **connais** le film. (I've seen it / I'm familiar with it.)
- Je **sais** que le film est long. (I know *as a fact* that the movie is long.)
- Je **connais** Paris.
- I'm familiar with Paris (because I've been there).
- Je **sais** que Paris est la capitale de la France.
- I know that Paris is the capital of France. (information)
- Je **sais** son numéro, mais je ne le **connais** pas par cœur.
- I **know** his number, but I don't **know** it by heart.
- Use *connaître* when you know something *by heart*, you are completely familiar with it.

## 6. Easy way to remember

- **connaître** = people, places, things
- **savoir** = facts, information, skills

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