

# History, geography and culture

Theme 4 of 5 · conforms to the official programme (arrêté du 10 October 2025)

## Revision sheet — History, geography and culture

This topic accounts for **8 of the 40 questions**. The official programme (the référentiel of the **decree of 10 October 2025**) splits it into **three sub-topics**: historical periods and figures (3 questions), territories and geography (3 questions), and French heritage (2 questions). This sheet covers **the whole of that programme**.

### The essentials in 30 seconds

- Over 1,500 years of history: from a Christian Frankish kingdom (Clovis, c. 496) to the **Fifth Republic** (since 1958).
- The **1789 Revolution** establishes human rights, then the Republic (1792).
- France has **~68 million inhabitants**, is highly urbanised, and is the **world's leading tourist destination**.
- **Founding member of the European Union**; currency: the **euro** (2002).

## 1. Main historical periods and figures (3 questions)

### The monarchy (until 1789)

From Clovis to Louis XVI, over a thousand years of Christian kingship, up to the Ancien Régime.

- **Clovis** — King of the Franks, baptised at Reims (c. 496): the first Christian Frankish kingdom.
- **Charlemagne** — crowned Emperor of the West in 800.
- **Louis XIV** — the "Sun King", absolute monarchy from Versailles (court settled there in 1682).
- **Louis XVI** — the last king of the Ancien Régime.

### The French Revolution (from 1789)

A break with the Ancien Régime: the birth of human rights and of the First Republic.

**Key dates:** **14 July 1789** (storming of the Bastille) · **26 August 1789** (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) · **1792** (proclamation of the First Republic) · 1793 (execution of Louis XVI).

### The Empire and the 19th century

- **Napoleon Bonaparte** — emperor in 1804; enacts the **Civil Code** (1804), still in force.
- **Colonial expansion** and the **abolition of slavery**: definitive abolition in **1848** (Victor Schoelcher).
- **The Republic takes hold (from 1880): free, secular and compulsory** schooling (Jules Ferry laws, 1881-1882); separation of Church and State (the **1905** law, secularism/laïcité).

## The 20th century

- **First World War (1914-1918)** — armistice on **11 November 1918**.
- **Second World War (1939-1945)** — the **Holocaust (Shoah)**, the **Resistance**, General de Gaulle's **Appeal of 18 June 1940**. Allied victory on **8 May 1945**.
- **1944** — **women's right to vote**.
- **1945** — creation of the **UN** (United Nations).
- **1957** — Treaty of Rome: creation of the **European Economic Community** (EEC), forerunner of the EU.

## The Fifth Republic (since 1958)

- **1958** — new Constitution, founded by Charles de Gaulle: the president has a strengthened role.
- **1962** — the president is elected by **direct universal suffrage**.
- **1950-1962** — **decolonisation** of the French empire in Asia and Africa (Algeria's independence in 1962).
- **1981** — **abolition of the death penalty** (President François Mitterrand, Justice Minister Robert Badinter).
- **1992** — **Maastricht Treaty**: creation of the European Union · **2002** — switch to the **euro**.

## 2. Territories and geography (3 questions)

- **Location:** France is in **Western Europe**. Metropolitan France = mainland France (the "Hexagon") and Corsica.
- **Neighbouring countries:** Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain (plus Monaco and Andorra).
- **Seas and ocean:** the English Channel (north), the Atlantic Ocean (west), the Mediterranean Sea (south), the North Sea.
- **Main rivers:** the **Loire** (the longest), the **Seine**, the **Rhône**, the **Garonne**.
- **Mountain ranges:** the **Alps** (Mont Blanc, the highest peak), the **Pyrenees**, the **Massif Central**, the Jura, the Vosges.
- **Overseas (DROM):** Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Réunion, Mayotte.
- **Population & cities:** around **68 million inhabitants** (2025); **9 people in 10 live in towns**. Capital: **Paris**. Major cities: Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, Nice, Nantes... Major ports: Marseille, Le Havre.
- **Economy & tourism:** France is the **world's leading tourist destination**; a founding member of the **European Union** with the single currency, the **euro**.

## 3. French heritage (2 questions)

- **Iconic monuments:** the **Eiffel Tower** and the **Louvre** museum (Paris), **Notre-Dame de Paris** cathedral, the Palace of **Versailles**, **Mont-Saint-Michel**, the châteaux of the **Loire**.

- **Artists and authors:** writers such as **Molière** and **Victor Hugo**; painters such as **Claude Monet** (Impressionism); the sculptor **Auguste Rodin** Auguste Rodin free and official revision sheets
- **Gastronomy:** the "**gastronomic meal of the French**" is on the **UNESCO** intangible heritage list (baguette, cheeses, regional cooking).
- **Festivals and traditions:** the national day on **14 July**, the end-of-year holidays, the Fête de la musique (21 June).
- **The French language:** spoken by around **321 million people** worldwide; the **5th** most spoken language.

## Symbols and values (reminder)

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*The motto, symbols and secularism are detailed in the [Principles and values of the Republic](#) topic. In short:*

- **Tricolour flag** (blue, white, red) · **La Marseillaise** (anthem, Rouget de Lisle, 1792) · **Marianne** (allegory of the Republic) · the **rooster** (emblem).
- **Motto:** Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. **Secularism (laïcité):** the 1905 law, the State is neutral.

## Common mistakes

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- Confusing **1789** (Revolution) with **1958** (Fifth Republic).
- Thinking women have voted since 1789: it is **1944**.
- Mixing up **14 July** (national day), **11 November** (1918 armistice) and **8 May** (1945 victory).
- Forgetting the date the **death penalty was abolished: 1981**.
- Confusing the **longest river** (the Loire) with the river of Paris (the Seine).

*Tip: review these landmarks in short sessions, then test yourself under real conditions with the [timed mock exam](#).*