

WARE'S LANGUAGE NOTES

Finding your way about

Visiting somewhere new? Need to find the Post Office? « *Où est la Poste* » might get you the answer « *Derrière la Gendarmerie* » and that hasn't moved you on very far. To make sure you get directed to where you want to go, there's a very simple phrase you can use:

« *Pour aller à ..., s'il vous plaît?* » (To get to, please?)

and then stand back and listen hard!

Everything in French is either masculin or féminin, which is why Poirot and characters from “Allo Allo” talk about stealing him or her or hiding him or her when they mean money or the picture of the Madonna with the big boobies etc, and this is true of places in a town, too. So it's useful to know if what you are looking for is LA Poste or LE Musée, or even LES Halles (covered market), because the phrase changes slightly accordingly -

« *Pour aller A LA Poste, s'il vous plaît?* »

« *Pour aller AU Musée, s'il vous plaît?* »

« *Pour aller AUX Halles, s'il vous plaît?* »

If where you're going starts with a vowel or a mute h, you use the sexless:

« *Pour aller A L'hôpital, s'il vous plaît?* »

What happens next is a bit unpredictable – often a flood of words. So then you have to pick out some key words...

Allez.. Tournez..Montez..Descendez..Traversez.. (Go, turn, go up, go down, cross)

Tout droit (too drwa: straight on) *à droite* (a drwatt: on/to the right) *à gauche* (on/to the left)

Jusqu'au feu/carrefour/pont/passage à niveau (juice-co fur etc: as far as the lights, crossroads, bridge, level crossing)

Jusqu'à la place/la piscine/la gare (juice-ka la plass/pee-scene/gar etc: as far as the square/swimming pool/station etc)

Prenez la première/deuxième à droite/gauche (take the first/second on the right/left)

And when it comes down to it, it will nearly always end up with the « *Derrière la Gendarmerie* » instruction, but by then you will have discovered how to get to it! It probably won't be *derrière* and almost certainly not the *Gendarmerie*, but you will probably get a reference to one landmark or other, so you would need to know the relationships:

en face de (opposite) *à côté de* (next to) *entre ... et ...* (between) *au coin de la rue* (on the corner) *après* (after) *avant* (before you get to)

Interestingly, the landmark often used is *la boulangerie*. Everybody seems to know where they are. They are quite easy to spot in a row of shops – have you noticed that nearly all of them have a passage *piétons* (pedestrian crossing) in front of them? I have often wondered if it is to make it easier for customers to double park on both sides of the road as they rush to get their bread.