

Gilles Asselin & Ruth Mastron,
"Au contraire! Figuring Out the
French"

With Friends

French people and Americans both value their friends, but ideas about who is a friend, how friends are made, and what friendship means are very different. Since these differences are the source of frequent misunderstandings on both sides, it is important to analyze and clarify them.

The Language of Friendship and Love

In English, we can distinguish among acquaintances, colleagues, and friends, at least linguistically. In the United States, though, people rarely do so, using the word *friend* to refer to someone they met yesterday or to someone they have known since childhood. About the only distinction normally made in the U.S. is between a "casual" friend and a "close" or "best" friend.

The French language allows for the most subtle of gradations in the nouns we use to speak of people we know, and French culture requires they be used.

un(e) ami(e): a friend

une connaissance: an acquaintance, someone you know superficially

