

The Secret Behind “To Mean” in French

In French, “to mean” is actually a mix of two verbs.
We literally say “to want to say”!

Vouloir + **Dire** = **To Mean**
(To Want) (To Say)



Verb 1 (Vouloir) changes to match the subject. Verb 2 (Dire) always stays locked in its base infinitive form.



Conjugating *Vouloir* (Present Tense)

Repeat after me! C'est parti!

The Variable (Subject + <i>Vouloir</i>)		The Constant	Meaning
Je veux	+	...dire	= I mean
Tu veux	+	...dire	= You mean
Il/Elle veut	+	...dire	= He/She means
Nous voulons	+	...dire	= We mean
Vous voulez (formal/you all)	+	...dire	= You mean
Ils/Elles veulent	+	...dire	= They mean

Essential Expressions for Conversation

When you need more details or want to ensure you are understood in France.

Everyday French (Vouloir dire)

Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? -> What does this mean?

Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire? -> What do you mean? (informal)

Qu'est-ce que vous voulez dire? -> What do you mean? (formal)

Qu'est-ce que ce mot veut dire? -> What does this word mean?

Qu'est-ce qu'il veut dire? -> What does he mean?

Sophisticated French (Signifier)

Qu'est-ce que cela signifie ? -> What does this mean?

Qu'est-ce que ce symbole signifie ? -> What does this symbol mean?



Rule: Never use *signifier* when YOU are the subject!
(You cannot say 'Je signifie' to mean 'I mean').



The Café Challenge: Practice Your Skills

The First Course

Complete the phrase using the correct form of vouloir:

1. Nous _____ dire. (Answer: voulons)
 2. Je _____ dire. (Answer: veux)
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The Main Course

Draw a mental line to connect the French to the English:

Qu'est-ce que vous voulez dire ?	→	What does this word mean?
Qu'est-ce que ce mot veut dire ?	→	What do you mean? (formal)

The Dessert

Which phrase sounds slightly more sophisticated?

- A) Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire ?
- B) Qu'est-ce que cela signifie ? (Correct)
- C) Je veux dire.

Félicitations! You are now ready to speak with clarity.

