Kindly Dr. Powell’s guide to French

I. Vowels

All French vowels have two pronunciations: one **regular** and one **nasal**. Final “M” and “N” cause the preceding vowel to change its sound (the consonants are Absolutement SILENT!).

A is pronounced as a slightly brighter “ah” than in the word “father.”
(not “ae” (cat), however)
AN, AEN, AON are all nasal “ah.”
AU, EAU are pronounced as closed “o.”

E is pronounced as a closed “e” when accented acute [é], in verbs “er,” in word “et.”
E and EI are pronounced “eh” when accented grave [ê] or circumflex [è], when followed by a consonant in the same syllable, in monosyllables “les,” “mes,” “ses,” “est,” etc.
E is a “schwa” [neutral] sound when ending a syllable, in final “es,” in verb “ent” ending. The lips must be forward and rounded for the French schwa.
EN and EAN are pronounced nasal “ah.” (Same sound as “an”—go figure . . .)

EU and OEU are pronounced as German “ö” (lips shape “O” but place tongue as for “ee”).

I, Ì and Y are pronounced “ee,” as in “feet.” [Never as “I” in “fit.”]
IN, IEN, EIN, AIN are nasal “eh.”

O can be closed or open. It is closed when it has a circumflex [ö], when it’s followed by a silent, final consonant, when followed by a voiced “s” [z]. Otherwise it is open.
ON is pronounced closed, nasal “oh.”
OU, OI, OY produce a glide ([w]—start on “oo” and move to the next sounded vowel; “ouï” = oo-ee).

U is pronounced “ü” as in German u-umlaut (shape lips in “oo” but place tongue as for “ee”). It is never “oo” (moon) or “û” (foot).
UI is a glide (think of “y” in English “yes”—UI begins with French ü and moves to “ee”).
UN and EUN are pronounced nasal “ö.” [see sound for EU, above]

II. Consonants

French consonants are pronounced more gently than English consonants.

The following consonants are normally silent at the end of words:
D, G, M, N, P, S, T, S, Z

B [final] is silent when preceded by a nasal vowel; otherwise it is sounded.

C [final] is silent when preceded by a nasal vowel; otherwise it is sounded (with minor exceptions).
L [final] is usually silent when preceded by “I”; otherwise it is sounded.

H is silent. B, P, D, T are pronounced as in Latin.

G is hard when followed by “A,” “O,” “U,” and any consonant. It is soft when followed by “E,” “I,” or “Y.” (Think of the English word “garage”—the first g is hard, the second is soft.)

C is hard when followed by “A,” “O,” “U,” and any consonant. It is soft when followed by “E,” “I,” or “Y.” (Hard c is a “K” sound, soft c is an “S.” Ç is also an “S.”)

CH is pronounced “sh” as in “shoot.”

R is flipped—never use an American “arrrr.” Do not use the uvular R in sung French.

S is voiced [pronounced “z”] between vowels (“intervocalie”), otherwise it is unvoiced [“S”].