France lets some champagne be stronger

LEVEL B1


Photo: Unsplash

I. WARM-UP

1. What foods or drinks change with the weather where you live?
2. What do you know about champagne and how it is made?
3. Do you prefer drinks with lower or higher alcohol? Why?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

temporarily
For a short time only, not permanent.

drought
A long period with very little or no rain.

fermentation
A process where yeast turns sugar into alcohol and gas.

harvest
The time when farmers pick crops like grapes.

regulatory
Related to official rules made by authorities.

vintage
Wine made from grapes harvested in a particular year.

exceed
To be more than a set amount or limit.

heatwave
A period of very hot weather that lasts several days.

III. READING

France has temporarily lifted the regulatory limit on champagne's strength after record heatwaves. Producers may make wines up to 15% alcohol this year, above the usual 13% cap. The extreme heat and drought made grapes sweeter, and during fermentation yeast turns that sugar into alcohol.

The Champagne region saw its earliest-ever harvest, with the first grapes cut in early August. The Comité Champagne says such timing could become normal in 10 to 15 years because of climate change.

A spokeswoman added that only a very small number of wines from this harvest are expected to exceed 13%, at about 13.1% or 13.2%. The higher limit was approved as a safety net. Some in the trade doubt stronger bottles will be popular, noting many consumers now prefer lower alcohol. The 2026 vintage is unlikely to reach shops until 2028, because champagne must age for at least 15 months.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **BBC News***: "Record heatwaves in France set to make...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What change did France allow for champagne this year?
2. What weather conditions made the grapes sweeter?
3. When did the earliest harvest begin in the Champagne region?
4. Who said earlier harvests could become normal in 10–15 years?
5. When is the 2026 vintage likely to reach shops?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Should rules change when climate makes crops different? Why or why not?
2. Do you think consumers will accept stronger champagne? Explain.
3. What climate changes have you noticed in your region?
4. How can producers balance nature and consumer tastes?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Present perfect continuous

Use have/has + been + verb-ing to describe actions that started in the past and are still happening now.

*"Winemakers **have been monitoring** grape sugar levels since July."*

*"Vine growers **have been worrying** about hotter summers this year."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence using the present perfect continuous.

1. The heat (make) ___ grapes sweeter all summer. _____
2. Growers (harvest) ___ earlier than usual this summer. _____
3. Scientists (study) ___ how drought affects grape sugar levels. _____
4. Vintners (experience) ___ hotter, drier conditions for months. _____
5. Some consumers (choose) ___ lower-alcohol wines lately. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Unsplash

I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8-10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12-15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8-10 minutes grammar, 10 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach key processes with a simple diagram: grape sugar, fermentation, alcohol and bubbles, and check understanding of percentage limits with quick examples.
- Run a first skim read for the main change, then a second careful read to find numbers (13%, 15%, dates). Pair students to compare answers before class feedback.
- Differentiate in discussion: give stronger students the task of citing two details from the text to support each opinion, while others may share personal observations first.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Start with a quick show of hands, then pair students with different views to exchange reasons.
2. Elicit likely first answers (marketing, taste), then push for evidence from the text or examples.
3. Use a quick brainstorm of local signs (hotter summers, drought) before students share short stories.
4. Set up two columns on the board (nature/consumers); groups propose one practical step for each side.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 70-word shop sign explaining why some 2026 champagne may be stronger this year.

Survey: Create 5 questions on alcohol levels in wine, survey classmates, and present a simple chart of results.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Present perfect continuous

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

TEACHERS ONLY

These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.


Photo: Unsplash

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What change did France allow for champagne this year?
   A temporary increase of the alcohol limit to 15%.
2. What weather conditions made the grapes sweeter?
   Record heatwaves and drought.
3. When did the earliest harvest begin in the Champagne region?
   In early August.
4. Who said earlier harvests could become normal in 10–15 years?
   The Comité Champagne.
5. When is the 2026 vintage likely to reach shops?
   In 2028, because it must age at least 15 months.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use have/has + been + verb-ing to describe actions that started in the past and are still happening now. (Examples constructed.)

"Winemakers **have been monitoring** *grape sugar levels since July."*

"Vine growers **have been worrying** *about hotter summers this year."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence using the present perfect continuous.

1. The heat ___ grapes sweeter all summer. **has been making**
2. Growers ___ earlier than usual this summer. **have been harvesting**
3. Scientists ___ how drought affects grape sugar levels. **have been studying**
4. Vintners ___ hotter, drier conditions for months. **have been experiencing**
5. Some consumers ___ lower-alcohol wines lately. **have been choosing**