

Tu and Vous

At first sight *tu* and *vous* just seem to be a singular and plural for "you".

This was **not** helped by old-fashioned text books having verbs conjugated in 2 columns headed *singular* and *plural* like this:

<i>singular</i>	Present	<i>plural</i>
j'aime		nous aimons
tu aimes		vous aimez
il/elle aime		ils/elles aiment

But actually it's a bit more complicated. In former times in English we had *Thou* and *You*. *Thou* was an intimate form one would use with one's family members and spouse, whereas *You* would be used more formally with individual strangers and persons of rank and importance, as well as when addressing more than one person..

So it is, more-or-less, with *Tu* and *Vous* in French, and similar versions exist in other European languages.

There is an amusing and informative flow-chart which was published in an American journal to help people decide which form was appropriate in particular cases, and this appears as the second page of this document.

Generally, at first meeting one would use the *vous* form and continue until invited to change to the *tu* form, or until the other person naturally lapsed into the *tu* form when addressing you.

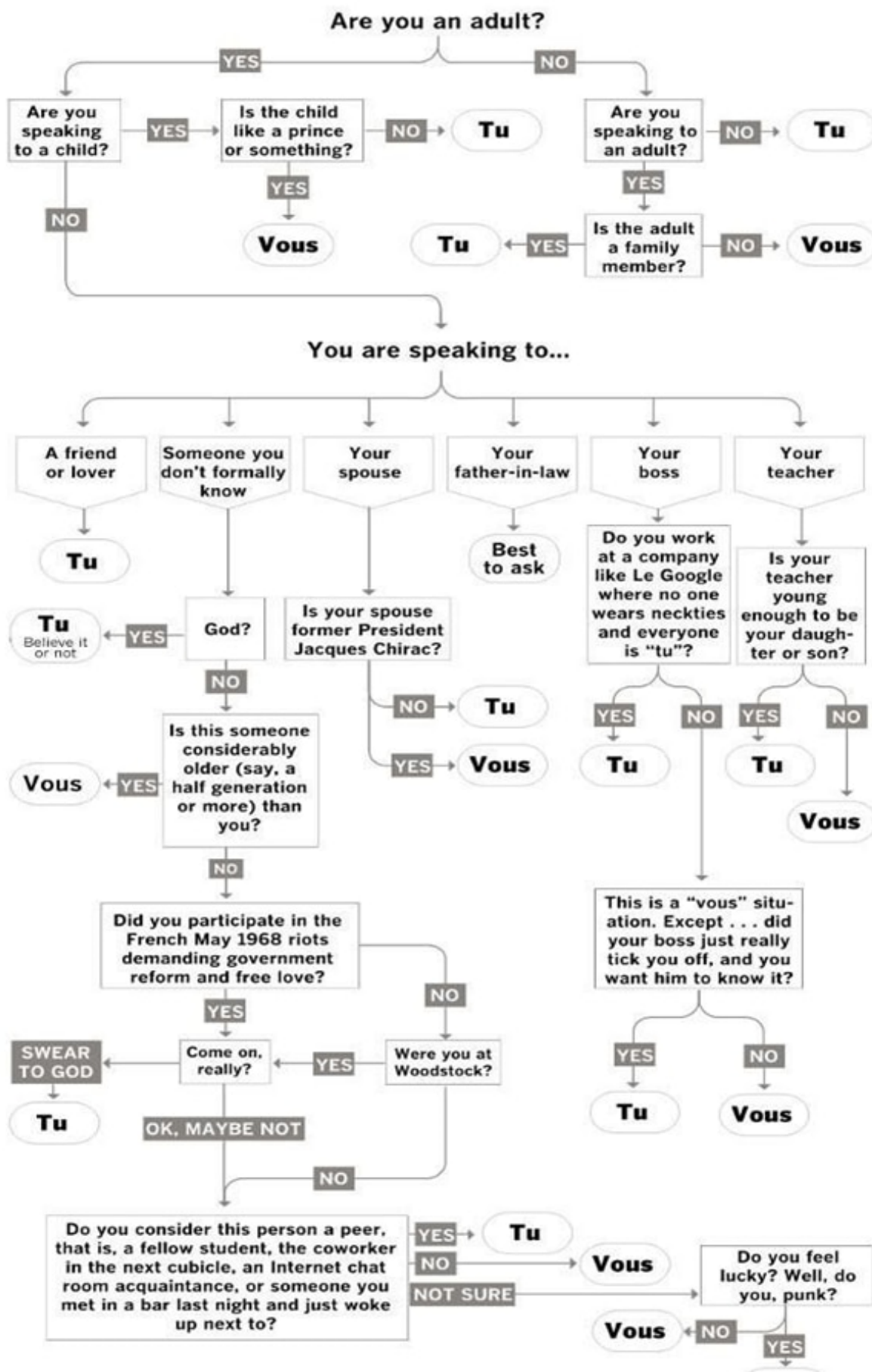
This quick lapsing to the *tu* form possibly happens more quickly in rural areas.

This is somewhere you would probably never reach with your notaire, doctor, dentist, optician, or anyone else with whom you have a professional relationship.

There is actually a verb for each form of address which you can use to ask if you might "become more familiar"!

The two verbs are *tutoyer* and *vousvoyer*, the former being the one used when a more intimate form of address is broached:

On se tutoie ? May we call each other "tu"?



You are speaking to...

