Typing accents on your Mac or PC

On a Macintosh

To create accented letters and special characters on a Macintosh, use the "option" key in combination with another key on the keyboard BEFORE you type the letter the accent goes on. For example, to create an à (a with an Accent grave), hold down the [option] key and press [`], then release those two keys and type the "a"

ACCENT GRAVE: à, è, ì, ò, ù, À, È, Ì, Ò, Ù	Option + [~], then letter
ACCENT AIGU: é, É	Option + [e], then letter
CIRCONFLEXE: â, ê, î, ô, û, , Ê, Î, Ô, Û	Option + [i], then letter
TRÉMA: ä, ë, ï, ö, ü	Option + [u], then letter
CEDILLE: ç / Ç	Option + [c] / Option + Shift + [c]

On a Windows machine

Option 1: use the "Alt" key

To create accented letters and special characters, Windows programs use the "Alt" key in combination with a number code entered using the keypad to the right of the main keyboard. For example, to create an ò (o with an accent grave), hold down the Alt key and enter the code 0210 on the keypad. Upon release of the Alt key the character will be entered on the screen.

Some Windows programs also have an Insert Symbol command that allows you to choose what accented letter you wish to use. This can be simpler than using the [alt] key commands. Some programs such as Word even let you type the accented letters directly, but this differs from program to program. Check your word processor's help files.
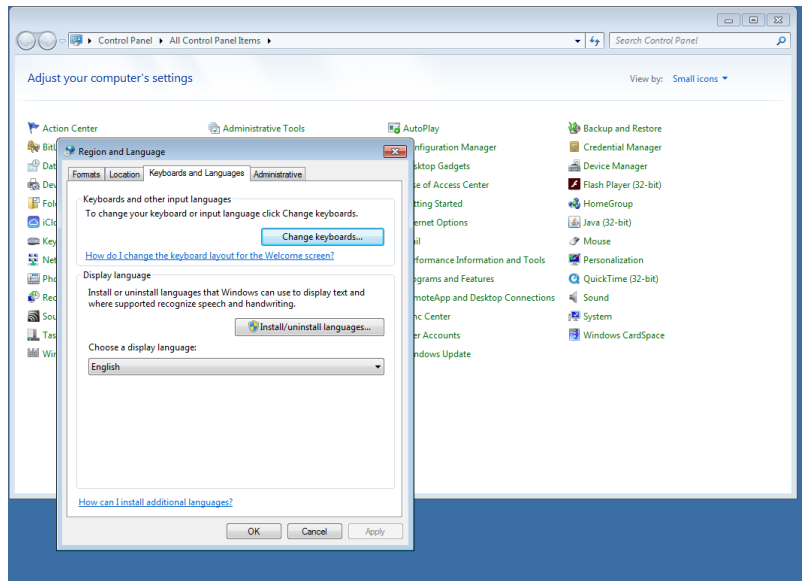
Windows "Alt" codes for accented letters used in French are shown in the table below. Make sure the "Num Lock" function is turned on.

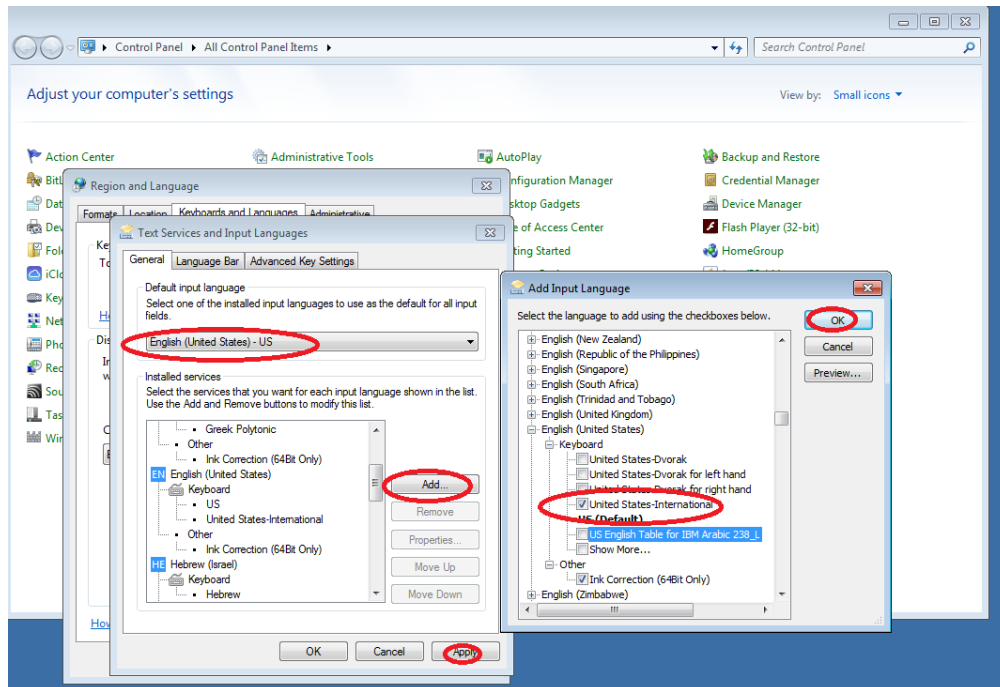|				
ACCENT GRAVE: à, è, ì, ò, ù, À, È, Ì, Ò, Ù	à = 0224 À = 0192	è = 0232 È = 0200	ì = 0236 Ì = 0204	ò = 0242 Ò = 0210	ù = 0249 Ù = 0217
ACCENT AIGU: é, É		é = 0233 É = 0201			
CIRCONFLEXE: â, ê, î, ô, û, , Ê, Î, Ô, Û	â = 0226 Â = 0194	ê = 0234 Ê = 0202	î = 0238 Î = 0206	ô = 0244 Ô = 0212	û = 0251 Û = 0219
TRÉMA: ä, ë, ï, ö, ü	ä = 0228	ë = 0235	ï = 0239	ö = 0246	ü = 0252
CEDILLE: ç / Ç	ç = 0231 Ç = 0199				

Option 1: use the "international keyboard setting"

For US English keyboard users, the international keyboard (which is not a physical keyboard, but rather a simple Control Panel setting) is the easiest and most convenient method for typing French accents because it maintains the QWERTY layout, with just a few changes and additions:

To use the "international keyboard setting" go to Control Panel. Select "Region and Language", then click "keyboards and languages". Click "Change keyboard".

In the list of "Installed services", look for "English (US) -United States-International". If that is not in the list, click "Add" and search for it in the dropdown box. Click the checkbox, and "apply". Click "apply" for all other questions. You can make the US-International keyboard the default if you want, or you will see a "keyboard" icon you can press to select the international keyboard when you need it.

When you type in your document with the keyboard setting "United States-International", type the following in order to use the accents:

- Accent grave (à, è, etc), type ` (to the left of 1) then the vowel.

- Accent aigu (é), type ' (single quote) then e.
- Cédille (ç), type ' then c.

- Circonflexe (ê), type ^ (shift + 6) then e.

- Tréma (ï), type " (shift + ') then i.

- To type French quotation marks « » use ctrl + alt + [and], respectively.

  Note: The minor disadvantage of the international keyboard is that when you want to type the "helping" character (e.g., single or double quotes) by itself rather than above a vowel, you have to type the symbol then hit the space bar. For example, to type *c'est*, type *c*then ' then hit the spacebar then type *e s t*. It takes a little while to get used to typing that extra space when you just want to type ' or "

Sources:

http://ms.loganhocking.k12.oh.us/~madame/french/accents.htm

http://french.about.com/od/writing/ss/typeaccents.htm#step2