**Avoir beau**

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| **[Avoir beau - to do in vain](https://www.lawlessfrench.com/wp-content/uploads/avoir-beau.png)** | |
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**Vain French Expression**

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| **Meaning** | **to do in vain, whatever one does** |
| **Literally** | **to have beautiful** |
| [**Register**](https://www.lawlessfrench.com/linguistics/register/) | **normal** |

**Usage notes: The French phrase *avoir beau* might seem odd, as it uses *avoir* (to have) plus an action verb in the**[**infinitive**](https://www.lawlessfrench.com/grammar/infinitive/)**, but this is the most common way to express doing something in vain in French.**

**Par exemple…**

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| ***J’ai beau dire la vérité, personne ne me croit.*** |  | **I’m telling the truth, but in vain: no one believes me.** |
| ***Elle a beau protester, le contrat va être annulé.*** |  | **No matter how much she protests, the contract is going to be cancelled.** |

***Avoir beau* is often used to make general statements of impotence, with the**[**indefinite pronoun *on***](https://www.lawlessfrench.com/grammar/subject-pronoun-on/)**:**

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| ***On a beau essayer, on ne peut pas le faire.*** |  | **Try as we might / No matter how much we try, we can’t do it.** |
| ***On a beau résister, la construction continue.*** |  | **However much we resist, the construction (nonetheless) continues.** |

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**Note that the main verb is always an infinitive, not a**[**past participle**](https://www.lawlessfrench.com/grammar/past-participle/)**; the latter would create a phrase with the**[***passé composé***](https://www.lawlessfrench.com/grammar/passe-compose/)**modified inexplicably by *beau*.**

**Also remember that because the infinitive and past participle of**[**-er verbs**](https://www.lawlessfrench.com/grammar/regular-er-verbs/)**sound the same, you might be tempted to consider some of the above examples as past actions, but they’re not: *avoir* is in the present, which means the vain acts are too. To talk about a vain attempt in the past, *avoir* itself needs to be conjugated into the *passé composé*:**

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| ***J’ai eu beau chercher une jolie girouette, elles sont trop chères.*** |  | **I looked in vain for a nice weather vane, but they’re too expensive.** |
| ***Elle a eu beau protester, le contrat a été annulé.*** |  | **No matter how much she protested, the contract was (nonetheless) cancelled.** |

**Synonyms**

* ***faire en vain***
* ***faire inutilement***