



06. The basics of questions

Learn the different ways you can formulate questions in French

Yes/ No questions

There are three ways to ask yes/ no questions in the present tense. In this example we are asking if you like apples:

1. **Inflection (spoken French):** This is the easiest way to ask a yes/ no question. Simply make your voice go up at the end of the sentence i.e. *Tu aimes les pommes* becomes ***Tu aimes les pommes?*** raising your voice at the end of the sentence. This is the least formal but an accepted way to ask a question in spoken French.
2. **Est-ce que:** Using this method, the word order stays the same again but we add *Est-ce que* to the beginning i.e. ***Est-ce que tu aimes les pommes?*** We are turning a statement into a question.
3. **Inversion:** With a simple inversion, place the verb in front of the subject pronoun and add a hyphen i.e. ***Aimes-tu les pommes?***



Listen to the three different question examples



Tip!

Using inversion:

- If the verb ends in a vowel, a *-t-* is placed before the *il* or *elle* i.e. *Parle-t-il français?* Does he speak French?
- With reflexive verbs, the reflexive pronoun remains before the verb in the present tense. i.e. *Te rappelles-tu?* Do you recall?



Useful!

- There is or there are:

A useful expression to remember is '*Y a-t-il...?*'. If you are keen to know why it is written like this, read on. Firstly, we are asking a question using inversion, this means that we are switching the subject ('il') and the verb ('a'). Secondly, when you invert a verb and a subject and are left with two vowels next to each other, for ease of pronunciation, you add *-t-* between them. However, we are not quite finished, we also have to contend with the preposition 'y' (there). It is positioned before the verb so the resulting order is:

Example from Mini Life Video "*Visite de la ferme*": '*Y a-t-il des oeufs frais?*' Are there fresh eggs?

Question words – where, when, how, how much and why

When formulating an open question you can use an interrogative adverb:

- *Où* = Where
- *Quand* = When
- *Comment* = How
- *Combien (de)* = How many/ much
- *Pourquoi* = Why



Listen to the different interrogative adverbs above

Stand-alone: These can be used as stand-alone questions when the context has been given in the previous exchange. Example:

- 1ère personne: *Je suis triste* (I am sad)
- 2ème personne: *Pourquoi?*

Simple Inversion: To formulate a more complete question with *où*, *quand*, *comment* and *combien* we can use simple inversion. As explained above, start with the question word then place the verb in front of the **subject pronoun** don't forget the hyphen.

Example:

- *Où vas-tu?* Where are you going?

Double Inversion: With *pourquoi* and if these question words start a sentence with a **subject noun** (i.e. *les enfants*, *la maîtresse*) a double inversion needs to be used. Example:

- *Pourquoi les enfants sortent-ils sans chaussures?* Why are the children going out with no shoes on?

Spoken French: You may hear or even prefer to use *Est-ce que* in spoken French.

- *Comment est-ce qu'il a fait ça?* How did he do that?

You may also hear the question word being tagged on to the end of a sentence.

- *Ça coute combien?* How much does that cost?



Tip!

- *Que* contracts when placed before a vowel. *Est-ce que + il* becomes *Est-ce qu'il...* etc



Useful!

Tag questions – *N'est-ce pas?*

You may have heard this expression after a statement. It is a 'tag question' meaning that it is used after a statement and it is used to ask for confirmation or agreement. It could be translated as "Don't you think?" or "Isn't that so?"



Listen to *N'est-ce pas?*

Question words – which or what

When asking someone to make a choice we need an interrogative adjective – *quel, quelle, quels* or *quelles*. It is always accompanied by a noun and agrees in gender and number. Examples:

1. *Quel serpent est le plus long?* Which snake is the longest?
2. *Quelle voiture préfères-tu?* Which car do you prefer?

	Singular	Plural
Masculine	quel	quels
Feminine	quelle	quelles



Listen: All four above interrogative adjectives are pronounced the same

Useful!

- What is/ What are:

There may be a need for *être* in some questions. In which case, it will be placed between the interrogative adjective – *quel, quelle, quels* or *quelles* – and the noun. Example:

1. *Quelle est la date de ton anniversaire?* What date is your birthday?
2. *Quels sont les meilleurs films pour enfants?* What are the best films for kids?

Question words – who, whom or what

I'm going to come clean with you; this can be a little complicated. Let's explore the key points in using *qui, que* and *quoi*.

To identify which person:

- *Qui* – Who: Use when asking the identity of someone when they are the subject of the verb i.e the one doing the action.

Question structure → *Qui* replaces the subject i.e. *Qui fait ce bruit?* Who is making that noise?

- *Qui* – Whom: Use when asking the identity of someone when they are the direct object of the verb i.e. the one receiving the action.

Question structure → *Qui* + inversion or *Qui est-ce que* (spoken) i.e. *Qui as-tu vu?* OR *Qui est-ce que tu as vu?* Who did you see?

- *Qui* – After a preposition.

Question structure → (Preposition) + *qui est-ce que* or (Preposition) + *qui* + inversion i.e. *À qui est-ce que tu parles?* OR *À qui parles-tu?* Who are you speaking to.



To identify which thing:

- *Que* – What: Use when asking the identity of a thing (an objet or idea) i.e. *Qu'écris-tu?* OR *Qu'est-ce que tu écris?* (spoken) What are you writing?
- *Quoi* – What: Follows a preposition. i.e. *Avec quoi manges-tu?* OR *Avec quoi est-ce que tu manges?* (spoken) What are you eating with?

So that is a good overview of questions and I hope that gives you some confidence in this topic!