



08. What's the big deal with Le/ La/ Les and L'?

'Definite articles' are an important part of the French language. Learn how to use them correctly.

Definite articles: The four options

There are four options for *the* in French depending on whether the noun is masculine or feminine, singular or plural. Not forgetting to consider whether the first letter of the noun is a vowel or an h.

	masculine noun	feminine noun
singular	<i>le (l')</i>	<i>la (l')</i>
plural	les	les

Useful!

- **Liaison:** The *s* of *les* is silent unless it precedes a word that starts with a vowel. Similarly, the *s* is also pronounced for some words starting with *h* (see a later *Boost* for more info on ***h muet and h aspiré***). This is called liaison and the sound used for the *s* becomes *z*. i.e. *les éléphants* or *les hôpitaux*



Listen to the liaison in *les éléphants* and *les hôpitaux*

- **L':** used for nouns that start with a vowel and most nouns starting with *h* (see a later *Boost* for more info on ***h muet and h aspiré***).

Using definite articles

French definite articles are used in the same way as 'the' in English to talk about specific nouns.

However, what learners often find harder to grasp is that there are also many instances where a definite article should be included but you may not be expecting one. See a list of six such instances below.

General sense: A definite article is required when we are referring to a specific noun or group of nouns in a general sense. Examples:

- *J'aime les pommes* I like apples
- *Les souris aiment le fromage* Mice like cheese

In these examples, we are talking about apples and mice in a general sense.

 **Tip!**

- Would you say 'In general' before the sentence? Then you use a definite article!

Abstract nouns: As opposed to concrete nouns, these are *concepts* or *qualities*. You can't see, smell, taste, hear or touch them. In English, we wouldn't normally include a definite article for an abstract noun but in French we do. Examples:

- *L'amour est aveugle* Love is blind
- *Les prix augmentent* Prices are rising

Countries, continents and regions: The definite article is used in front of the names of countries, continents and regions. Examples:

- *La France est plus grande que l'Écosse* France is bigger than Scotland
- *L'Asie est très loin* Asia is far away
- *La Corse est une île* Corsica is an island

Body parts: Unlike English where we tend to use a word like 'my' or 'her', in French the definite article is usually used. Examples:

- *Il s'est cassé la jambe* He broke his leg
- *Elle a mal à la tête* She has a sore head

Subjects, languages & sports: The definite article is used in front of subjects, languages & sports where we wouldn't see it in English. Examples:

- *Je n'aime pas l'arithmétique* I don't like arithmetic
- *Nous apprenons le français* We are learning French
- *Son sport préféré est le tennis* His favourite sport is tennis

Dates, days of the week & times of day: Specific dates and actions which take place regularly require a definite article. Examples:

- *On est le 7 mars* Today is the 7th of March
- *Tous les mardis, il y a un marché* Every Tuesday there is a market
- *Le matin, on écoute la radio française* In the morning, we listen to French radio

Using à with le, la, l' and les

The preposition *à* follows many verbs and can be roughly translated as 'at' or 'to'.

When you use it together with *le* and *les* the words contract (become one word). With *la* or *l'* they do not become one word.

à + le	au
à + la	à la
à + l'	à l'
à + les	aux

Examples with 'aller à':

1. *Je vais à + le supermarché = Je vais au supermarché*
2. *Je vais à + la bibliothèque = Je vais à la bibliothèque*
3. *Je vais à + l'école = Je vais à l'école*
4. *Je vais à + les magasins = Je vais aux magasins*



Listen to the above four examples

So hopefully you have learned the importance of the definite article and when to use it! Now go and practice!