**How to Use French Direct Object Pronouns**

French has seven direct object pronouns (DOPs) — and three more when you count the forms with an apostrophe. Here are the direct object pronouns and their English equivalents.

* **me** (**m’** in front of a vowel or mute **-h**) (*me*)
* **te** (**t’** in front of a vowel or mute **-h**) (*you* [singular informal])
* **le** (**l’** in front of a vowel or mute **-h**) (*him/it* [masculine])
* **la** (**l’** in front of a vowel or mute **-h**) (*her/it* [feminine])
* **nous** (*us*)
* **vous** (*you* [singular formal or plural informal and formal])
* **les** (*them*)

Because it replaces a noun, a pronoun takes the appearance of the noun as much as possible, kind of like a chameleon! The pronoun must match the noun in gender and number. For example, when talking in the third person:

* If the noun to be replaced is masculine (such as **le père,** which means *the father*), the pronoun must be masculine (**le**).
* If the noun to be replaced is feminine (such as **la voiture,**which means*the car*), the pronoun must be feminine (**la**).
* If the noun to be replaced is plural masculine or feminine (such as **ses enfants,** which means *his/her children*), the pronoun must be plural (**les**).

**Know when to use a French direct object pronoun**

When you can go directly from a verb to its object (what the verb acts upon), you are dealing with a direct object (*I give money*). If there is a preposition (*I give to charity*) between the verb and an object, then you have an indirect object.

You can use a direct object pronoun to replace any noun, as long as the following two conditions are met:

* The noun to be replaced refers to a person or a thing. For example:
  + **Elle aime ses enfants.** (*She likes her kids.*) → **Elle les aime.** (*She likes them.*)
  + **Il aime le fromage.** (*He likes cheese.*) → **Il l’aime.** (*He likes it.*)
* The noun you want to replace is specific — that is, it’s preceded by a specific determiner such as a definite article (**le, la, or les** [*the*]), a possessive (**mon** [*my*], **ton** [*your*], and so on*)*, or a demonstrative (**ce**[*this*]). If the noun you want to replace is preceded by an indefinite determiner such as **un, une,** or **des** (*a, an, some*), don’t use the DOP.

Here’s a little trick that will really make the process of deciding if the object is specific easier for you. Proceed like this:

* + *Question:* Is the object I’m considering an “it/them” or a “some”?
  + *Answer:* It’s an “it/them” → Use the DOP.
  + *Answer:* It’s a “some” → Don’t use the DOP, and read the later section about the pronouns **en** and **y.**

For example, in *I like my comfort* (**J’aime mon confort**), “my comfort” is definitely an “it,” but in *I want some comfort* (**Je veux du confort**), you would not be able to use the direct object pronoun to replace it because of the word some (**du**).

**How to writing a sentence with a direct object pronoun**

Now you’re ready to start building sentences that include a DOP. Here’s how to proceed:

1. **Find the noun or phrase that is the direct object of the verb.**

For example, **Paul aime les pommes.**(*Paul likes apples.*)

1. **Choose the DOP that matches the direct object in number (singular or plural) and gender (feminine or masculine).**

**Les pommes** is feminine plural, so the corresponding DOP is **les.**

1. **Remove the entire direct object from your sentence.**

In this example, you’re left with **Paul aime.**

1. **Replace the direct object with the pronoun and place the pronoun properly in the sentence.**

In most sentences, you place the pronoun before the verb, but exceptions exist. In this example, you wind up with **Paul les aime.**

**How to Use French Indirect Object Pronouns**

In the French sentence **Nous parlons à nos parents** (*We talk to our parents*), the preposition **à** (to) stands in the path of the verb object. Meet an indirect object! To replace those types of objects, you now need the indirect object pronoun, or IOP. French has six indirect object pronouns, plus two more when you count the forms with an apostrophe.

Here are the indirect object pronouns and their English equivalents.

* **me** (**m’** in front of a vowel or mute **-h**) (*me/to me*)
* **te** (**t’** in front of a vowel or mute **-h**) (*you/to you* [singular informal])
* **lui** (*him/her; to him/her*)
* **nous** (*us/to us*)
* **vous** (*you/to you* [singular formal or plural formal and informal])
* **leur** (*them/to them*)

Note that the IOPs are the same as the DOPs, except for the third person singular (**lui**) and plural (**leur**). Also notice that the singular form has no gender distinction: both*him* and*her* are **lui** in French.

**Know the French verbs that require an indirect object**

You use an indirect object pronoun only to replace a noun that refers to a person, as in **Paul parle à Marie**(*Paul talks to Marie*). Certain verbs are always followed by the preposition **à** when they have a human object, so you have to use indirect objects (and IOPs) with them. Here are some common ones with their English equivalents.

* **annoncer à quelqu’un** (*to announce to someone*)
* **donner à quelqu’un** (*to give to someone*)
* **dire à quelqu’un** (*to tell to someone*)
* **faire la bise à quelqu’un** (*to kiss someone* [on the cheek])
* **obéir à quelqu’un** (*to obey someone*)
* **parler à quelqu’un** (*to talk to someone*)
* **poser des questions à quelqu’un**(*to ask someone questions*)
* **prêter à quelqu’un** (*to lend to someone*)
* **rendre visite à quelqu’un** (*to pay a visit to someone*)
* **ressembler à quelqu’un** (*to look like someone*)
* **téléphoner à quelqu’un** (*to call someone*)

Some common French verbs, like **regarder** (*to look at*), **écouter** (*to listen to*), **chercher** (*to look for*), and **attendre** (*to wait for*), use direct objects when their English counterparts use indirect objects.

It goes the other way, too: Some English verbs use direct objects, like**téléphoner à** (*to call*), **dire à** (*to tell*), and **rendre visite à** (*to visit*) when their French equivalents take indirect objects. You can see the differences in the following examples where the preposition that makes the object indirect is underlined, whether in French or in English:

**Nous attendons nos amis.** (*We are waiting for our friends.*)

**Je rends visite à Julie.** (*I visit Julie.*)

When dealing with pronouns, a verb + **à** + a human object generally triggers the use of an IOP. But as always, you can count on a few verbs to resist the common rule, and sometimes, even if you have a verb + **à** + a human object, you can’t use the IOP. Zut alors! What are you to do? Well, another pronoun called the *stress pronoun* can save the day.

**Put together a sentence with an indirect object pronoun**

Use an indirect object pronoun when you have a verb + **à** + human object (that is, a person or group of people) in a sentence. Proceed like this to replace the indirect object by the IOP:

1. **Spot the à + object right after the verb.**

For example: **Paul parle à sa mère.** (*Paul talks to his mother.*)

1. **Choose the IOP that matches the indirect object in number only (no gender distinction with the IOP).**

The IO, **à sa mère,**is third person singular, so you choose **lui.**

1. **Remove the entire indirect object group that you have underlined, including the à.**

In this example, you wind up with **Paul parle.**

1. **Replace the indirect object group with the pronoun you chose and place the pronoun properly in the sentence.**

In most sentences, you place the pronoun before the conjugated verb, but exceptions exist. In this example, you finish with **Paul lui parle.**

The best way to identify an indirect object is by spotting the **à** that follows the verb. However our little **à** likes to play tricks and wear a mask sometimes. It will appear as **au** (contracted form of **à + le**) or as **aux**(contracted form of **à + les**). Don’t be fooled! The following examples illustrate the contracted forms of **à.**

**Nous posons des questions au (à + le) professeur.** (*We ask the professor questions.*)

**Le prof parle aux (à + les) étudiants.** (*The professor talks to the students.*)

**Use the French Pronoun y to Replace Prepositional Phrases**

The French pronoun**y** replaces a prepositional phrase that indicates location, like **dans le garage** (*in the garage*). Such phrases begin with a preposition, like *at, under, in,* and so on. Here’s how to proceed to replace this type of prepositional phrase with **y:**

1. **Find the phrase that’s introduced by the preposition.**

For example: **Jeanne va à la plage.** (*Jeanne goes to the beach.*)

1. **Remove the entire prepositional phrase, including the preposition itself.**

In this case, you’re left with **Jeanne va.**

1. **Add the pronoun y to the sentence.**

In most sentences, you place the pronoun before the conjugated verb, but exceptions exist. In this example, you wind up with **Jeanne y va.**

***Note:*** When the pronoun **y** is preceded by **je,** **je** changes to **j’.**

See **y** in action in the following examples:

**Tu dormiras dans une tente.** (*You will sleep in a tent.*) → **Tu y dormiras.**

**Le chat est sous la table.**(*The cat is under the table.*) → **Le chat y est.**

**Nous allons au Québec.** (*We’re going to Quebec.*) → **Nous y allons.**

A phrase beginning with the preposition **de** (*from*) can’t be replaced by the pronoun **y,**even if the phrase indicates place. (Instead, you use the pronoun **en**.) See this distinction in action in the following two examples:

**Tu vas à la pharmacie.** (*You go to the pharmacy.*) → **Tu y vas.**

**Tu reviens de la pharmacie.**(*You’re coming back from the pharmacy.*) → **Tu en reviens.**

The pronoun **y** is not used just to indicate location. Use it when you want to replace a phrase with the pattern [**à** + thing], as in: **Je pense à mes vacances**(*I think about my vacation*) → **J’y pense.**

The IOP is only used in the case of [**à** + person]! Here are some examples that show the difference between **à** + a person and **à** + a thing:

**Je parle à mes amis.**(*I talk to my friends.*) → **Je leur parle.**(*I talk to them.*)

**Il obéit à son père.** (*He obeys his father.*) → **Il lui obéit.** (*He obeys him.*)

**Elle pense à ses vacances.**(*She thinks about her vacation*.) →**Elle y pense.** (*She thinks about it.*)

**Nous réfléchissons au problème.** (*We ponder/reflect on the problem.*) → **Nous y réfléchissons.** (*We ponder/reflect on it.*)

When **penser à**is followed by a thing, use **y,** but when **penser à** is followed by a person, use the stress pronoun.

**Use the French Pronoun En to Replace Prepositional Phrases**

The French Pronoun **en** can be used to replace many prepositional phrases that begin with **de**(which means *of, from,*and more depending on the prepositional phrase).

**French indefinite determiners**

Indefinite determiners include the plural indefinite article **des** (*some*); the partitives **du, de la, de l’**(*some/any*); and **de** (which takes the place of those articles after a negative verb). The following examples show you different types of articles being replaced by **en.**

**Nous mangeons du fromage.** (*We eat* [some] *cheese.*) → **Nous en mangeons.** (*We eat some.*)

**Tu as de la chance.** (*You have luck.*) → **Tu en as.**(*You have some.*)

**Elle ne veut pas de chien.**(*She doesn’t want a dog.*) → **Elle n’en veut pas.** (*She doesn’t want one.*)

To replace this type of phrase, proceed like this:

1. **Find the phrase that is introduced by the indefinite determiner:**

For example, **Paul a des enfants.** (*Paul has some kids.*)

1. **Remove the entire quantity phrase:**

In this case, you’re left with **Paul a.**

1. **Place the pronoun en properly in the sentence.**

In most sentences, you place the pronoun before the conjugated verb, but exceptions exist. In this example, you wind up with **Paul en a.**

**De + a thing with certain verbs**

When certain verbsare followed by a non-human object, you use the pronoun**en** to replace the whole phrase. For example, when using the verb **avoir peur de** (*to be afraid of*), **j’ai peur de l’orage**(*I am afraid of the storm*) becomes**j’en ai peur**(*I am afraid of it*).

Following are some common verbs of this type and their English equivalents. The noun you’re referring to (or simply **quelque chose** [*something*]) comes after each phrase:

* **avoir besoin de** (*to need*)
* **avoir envie de**(*to want*)
* **avoir peur de**(*to be afraid of*)
* **entendre parler de** (*to hear of*)
* [**être** + adjective] **de** ([*to be* + adjective] *of*)
* **jouer de**(*to play* [an instrument])
* **parler de** (*to talk about*)
* **profiter de** (*to take advantage of/to enjoy*)
* **s’occuper**(*to take care of*)
* **se servir de** (*to utilize*)
* **se souvenir de** (*to remember*)

To replace this type of **de** phrase, proceed like for the object pronoun **y**when it replaces **à** + non-human object: Remove the whole prepositional phrase including **de** and replace it with **en,** and then place it into the sentence. Here are a few examples.

**Bébé a peur de la nuit.** (*Baby is afraid of the night.*) → **Bébé en a peur.** (*Baby is afraid of it.*)

**Il profite de ses vacances pour se reposer.** (*He takes advantage of his vacation to rest up.*) → **Il en profite pour se reposer.** (*He takes advantage of it to rest up.*)

If the verb is pronominal, such as **se souvenir de** (*to remember*), then **en**must follow the reflexive pronoun and **me, te,**and **se** (only those three) change to**m’, t’,**and **s’.** For example: **Il s’en souvient.** (*He remembers it.*)

The **de** phrase must refer to a thing, not a person. If it is **de** + person, you can’t replace it with **en,** and you have to resort to a stress pronoun, as illustrated here

**Bébé a besoin de sa mère.** (*Baby needs his mother.*) → **Bébé a besoin d’elle.** (*Baby needs her.*)

**A prepositional phrase that starts with de**

When **de** expresses *from,*as in **Les athlètes rentrent de Londres** (*The athletes return home from London*), use the pronoun **en** to replace that whole phrase: **Les athlètes en rentrent.**

To replace this type of **de** prepositional phrase, proceed like this:

1. **Find the phrase that is introduced by de.**

For example, **Nous faisons partie de cette équipe.** (*We are part of this team.*)

1. **Remove the entire prepositional phrase, including de itself.**

In this case, you wind up with **Nous faisons partie.**

1. **Replace the prepositional phrase with the pronoun en and place it properly in the sentence.**

In most sentences, you place the pronoun before the conjugated verb, but exceptions exist. In this example, your sentence is **Nous en faisons partie.** (*We are part of it.*)