

Packing for the weather: seasons and temperatures

French A1 (beginner) · Lesson

Quick answer: To talk about the weather in French, use impersonal *il* with *faire* (*il fait beau*, *il fait froid*), with *pleuvoir* (*il pleut*) and *neiger* (*il neige*). Ask *Quel temps fait-il ?*. Say *au printemps* but *en été*, *en automne*, *en hiver*.

Level: French A1 (CEFR beginner) · **Standards:** CEFR A1, Reading

How do you describe the weather in French?

Most weather phrases are built with the impersonal subject *il* and the verb *faire*. The subject is just a placeholder, like "it" in "it is sunny".

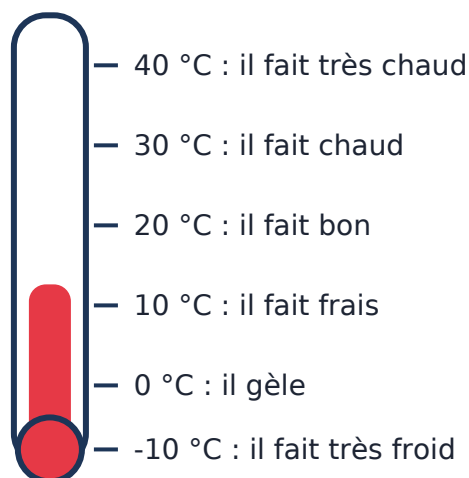
French	English
Il fait beau.	The weather is nice.
Il fait mauvais.	The weather is bad.
Il fait chaud / froid.	It is hot / cold.
Il fait doux.	It is mild.
Il pleut.	It is raining.
Il neige.	It is snowing.
Il y a du vent / du soleil.	It is windy / sunny.
Il y a des nuages.	It is cloudy.
Il y a de l'orage.	There is a thunderstorm.

Rule

With *faire* you describe the air: *il fait beau*. With *il y a* you name a thing in the sky: *il y a du brouillard* — there is fog. *Pleuvoir* and *neiger* have only one form: *il pleut*, *il neige*, *il a plu*.

How do you give a temperature?

Say *Il fait vingt-quatre degrés*. or write *24 °C*. Below zero, say *moins*: *Il fait moins deux*. — It is minus 2. To ask: *Quelle est la température à Lyon ?*



A thermometer with the French phrases for each temperature.

Common mistake

English speakers say "It is hot" and translate it as *Il est chaud*, which means a person or object is hot. For the weather, French needs *faire*: *Il fait chaud*. Another trap: Fahrenheit. 70 °F is only about 21 °C, so a French 30 °C is a hot 86 °F.

How do you say the seasons and when something happens?

le printemps mars – mai au printemps	l'été juin – août en été
l'hiver décembre – février en hiver	l'automne septembre – novembre en automne

Seasons in French: *au printemps*, but *en été*, *en automne*, *en hiver*.

What do you pack for each kind of weather?

Match the item to the weather: un parapluie (umbrella) for la pluie, un manteau (coat) and une écharpe (scarf) for le froid, des lunettes de soleil (sunglasses) and de la crème solaire (sunscreen) for le soleil, un maillot de bain (swimsuit) for la plage.

Planning a trip

En avril, il pleut souvent en Bretagne. Je mets un imperméable dans ma valise. — In April it often rains in Brittany. I put a raincoat in my suitcase.

Culture note

The mistral is a strong, cold, dry wind that blows in southern France, mainly in the Rhône valley and Provence. In Québec, winter temperatures often fall below -15 °C, so people wear a tuque (a knitted hat).

Zoé's tip

Before every trip, I look at the forecast, the météo, and write three lines: the weather, the temperature, one item to pack. It trains reading and it saves my suitcase.

Key points to remember

- Il in weather phrases means "it": it refers to nothing and never changes.
- Faire describes the weather (il fait chaud); pleuvoir and neiger are used only with il.
- France uses degrees Celsius: 0 °C is freezing, 20 °C is pleasant, 35 °C is a heat wave.
- Three seasons take en (en été, en automne, en hiver); only spring takes au (au printemps).
- Quel temps fait-il ? asks about the weather; Quelle est la température ? asks the temperature.

Packing for the Weather: Seasons and Temperatures: frequently asked questions

How do you ask about the weather in French?

Say Quel temps fait-il ? or, more casually, Il fait quel temps ?. For the temperature, ask Quelle est la température ?. The answer starts with il fait, il pleut or il y a.

Why do you say il fait chaud and not il est chaud?

Il est chaud describes an object or a person who is hot. For the weather French uses the impersonal il fait + adjective: il fait chaud, il fait froid, il fait beau.

How do you say a temperature in French?

Say the number and degrés: Il fait trente degrés. In writing use 30 °C. For negatives say moins: Il fait moins cinq for -5 °C. France uses Celsius, not Fahrenheit.

Is it au printemps or en printemps?

It is au printemps. The other three seasons use en: en été, en automne, en hiver. You may also say l'été without a preposition for a specific season.

What should you pack for a trip to France in winter?

Pack un manteau, une écharpe, des gants and des bottes. In the north and the east it is cold and wet in hiver. On the Mediterranean coast a light coat is often enough.