

Picking up a rental car and driving off

French A2 (elementary) · Lesson

Quick answer: At a French rental desk you show your permis de conduire, pay a caution and return the car with a full tank. To avoid repeating a place, put the pronoun y before the verb: Tu vas à l'agence ? — Oui, j'y vais. It replaces a place introduced by à, dans, en, sur or chez.

Level: French A2 (CEFR elementary) · **Standards:** CEFR A2, Spoken interaction

What words do you need at a car rental desk?

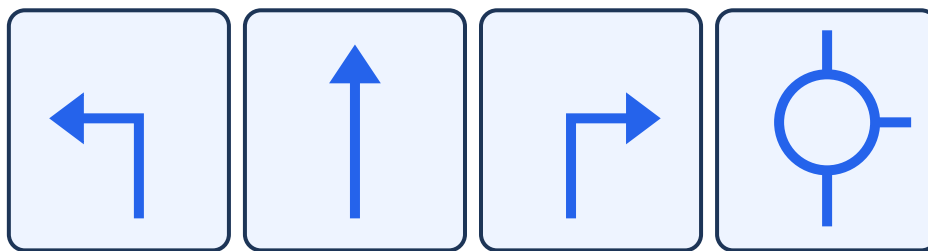
The agent will ask for your papers, explain the fuel and the price, and tell you when to bring the car back. Expect questions such as Vous voulez une boîte manuelle ou automatique ? and Vous rendez la voiture quand ? — Do you want a manual or an automatic? When are you returning the car?

French	English
louer une voiture	to rent a car
le permis de conduire	driver's license
la caution, l'assurance (f.)	deposit, insurance
une boîte automatique / manuelle	automatic / manual transmission
l'essence (f.), le gazole	gasoline, diesel
faire le plein	to fill up the tank
le péage	toll
rendre la voiture	to return the car

Culture note

French motorways are mostly toll roads: at the péage you pay by card or with an electronic badge. Unleaded gasoline is sold as SP95 or SP98, and diesel as gazole. The usual motorway limit is 130 km/h, or 110 km/h when it rains.

How do you give and understand directions?



tournez à gauche tout droit tournez à droite le rond-point

Four direction signs and their French phrases.

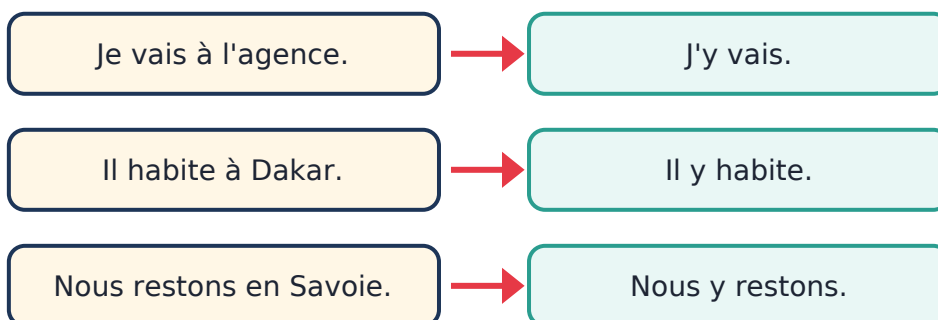
Examples

- Continuez tout droit jusqu'au feu. — Keep going straight to the traffic light.
- Au rond-point, prenez la deuxième sortie. — At the roundabout, take the second exit.
- Pour aller à la gare, s'il vous plaît ? — How do I get to the station, please?
- Prenez la deuxième rue à droite, puis tournez à gauche au feu. — Take the second street on the right, then turn left at the light.
- C'est à deux cents mètres, vous ne pouvez pas le manquer. — It's two hundred meters away, you can't miss it.

How does the pronoun **y** work?

Rule: the pronoun **y**

Y means *there*. It replaces a place introduced by *à, au, dans, en, sur* or *chez* that was already mentioned. It stands **before the verb**, just like *le* and *la*.



The place disappears and y takes its spot before the verb.

Structure	Example
simple	J'y vais. — I'm going there.
negative	Je n'y vais pas.

Structure	Example
verb + infinitive	Je veux y aller.
passé composé	J'y suis allée.
command	Vas-y !, Allons-y !

Watch out

English often drops *there*, but French cannot: to answer Tu vas à Annecy ? say Oui, j'y vais, not Oui, je vais. Also, y is for places and things, not people. Note that tu vas becomes Vas-y ! with an s, to make the pronunciation smooth.

Zoé's tip

Ask où ? after the verb. If the answer is a place with à, dans, en, sur or chez, say y before the verb. A short answer needs it: Tu y vas ? — Oui, j'y vais.

Key points to remember

- Y replaces a place introduced by à, au, dans, en, sur or chez and stands before the verb.
- In a negative sentence, use n'y before the verb: Je n'y vais pas.
- With an infinitive, y goes right before it: Je veux y aller.
- The command is Vas-y ! for tu (with an s) and Allons-y ! for nous.
- On French motorways the péage is paid by card or electronic badge; unleaded gasoline is SP95 or SP98.

Picking Up a Rental Car and Driving Off: frequently asked questions

What does the pronoun y mean in French?

It means there and replaces a place introduced by a preposition such as à, dans, en, sur or chez. Elle habite à Rabat becomes Elle y habite.

Where does y go in a sentence?

Directly before the conjugated verb: J'y vais. With an infinitive it goes before the infinitive: Je veux y aller. In an affirmative command it follows the verb: Allons-y !

Can y replace a person?

No. Y stands for places and things introduced by à or other place words, not for people. Direct object pronouns like le, la and les work for people and things.

How do you ask for a full tank at a gas station?

Say Le plein, s'il vous plaît. and name the fuel: du gazole for diesel or du SP95 for unleaded gasoline.

How do you give directions in French?

Use the vous command: Continuez tout droit, Tournez à gauche, Prenez la deuxième à droite. Add au rond-point or au feu to say where.