

How to advise someone politely

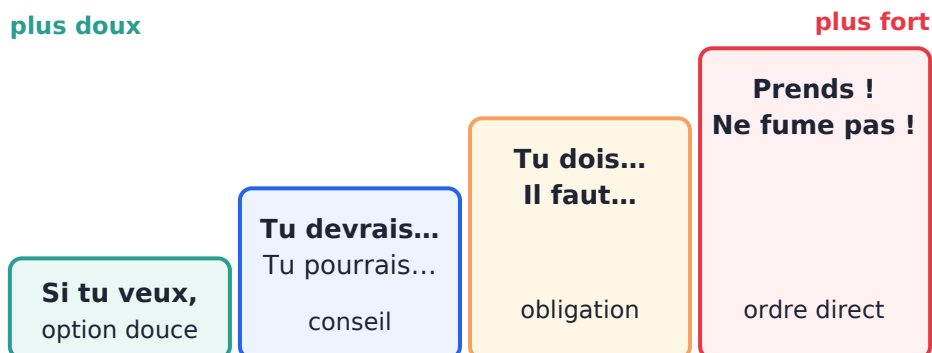
French A2 (elementary) · Lesson

Quick answer: In French, give advice with *tu devrais* or *vous devriez* for a gentle suggestion, *tu dois* or *il faut* for a strong need, the imperative for a direct order, and *si tu veux* to offer an option. The conditional makes advice sound polite, as in *Pourriez-vous...?*

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

How do you give advice in French?

French has several ways to advise someone, and the choice depends on how strong you want to sound. Think of a ladder: the higher the step, the less choice the other person has.



Advice from gentle to strong.

Structure	Example
Si tu veux, ... (option)	Si tu veux, je viens avec toi. — If you like, I'll come with you.
Tu devrais + infinitive	Tu devrais appeler ton propriétaire. — You should call your landlord.
Tu dois + infinitive	Tu dois te reposer. — You must rest.
Il faut + infinitive	Il faut valider le billet. — The ticket has to be validated.
Imperative	Prends ce médicament. — Take this medicine.

How do you use devoir?

Subject	Present (must)	Conditional (should)
je	dois	devrais
tu	dois	devrais

Subject	Present (must)	Conditional (should)
il / elle	doit	devrait
nous	devons	devrions
vous	devez	devriez
ils / elles	doivent	devraient

Il faut

Il faut never changes and is always followed by an infinitive. It states a general need: Il faut réserver à l'avance. The negative il ne faut pas expresses a prohibition.

How do you form the imperative?

Use the tu, nous and vous present forms without the pronoun. For tu with -er verbs, drop the final s.

Verb	tu	nous	vous
parler	parle	parlons	parlez
prendre	prends	prenons	prenez
aller	va	allons	allez
être	sois	soyons	soyez

Negative: Ne fume pas ici. · N'oublie pas ton badge.

Rachid :

Je dors très mal en ce moment.

conditionnel

Hélène :

Tu devrais éviter le café le soir.

impératif

Hélène :

Fais une promenade après le dîner.

Si tu veux, essaie aussi une tisane.

Soft advice in a real exchange.

How do you make a polite request?

The conditional also softens requests, which matters at the post office, at the pharmacy or with a manager.

- Je voudrais un renseignement, s'il vous plaît. — I would like some information, please.
- Pourriez-vous répéter, s'il vous plaît ? — Could you repeat, please?
- Tu pourrais m'aider avec ce formulaire ? — Could you help me with this form?

Watch out

"You don't have to" is not *tu ne dois pas*, which means "you must not." Say *tu n'as pas besoin de* or *tu n'es pas obligé(e) de*. Also, after *devoir* there is no *de*: *Tu devrais te reposer*.

At the pharmacy

French pharmacies, marked by a green cross, are a first stop for minor health problems, and pharmacists give advice freely.

Zoé's tip

To sound kind, soften an order: replace *Tu dois* with *Tu devrais* and add *si tu veux* or *à ta place*. Your advice will land better.

Key points to remember

- Devoir in the present means must: *je dois, nous devons*.
- *Tu devrais* (conditional) means should and sounds kinder than *tu dois*.
- *Il faut* + infinitive states a general need; *il ne faut pas* means must not.
- In the imperative, -er verbs lose the s of the tu form: *Parle !*
- After *si tu veux*, use the present: *Si tu veux, je viens*.

How to Advise Someone Politely: frequently asked questions

How do you give advice politely in French?

Use the conditional: *tu devrais, tu pourrais* or *à ta place, je...*. Add *si tu veux* to leave the choice to the other person.

What is the difference between *tu dois* and *il faut*?

Tu dois speaks to one person and sounds personal. *Il faut* is impersonal and invariable, so it states a general rule or need.

How do you form the imperative in French?

Take the present forms of *tu, nous* or *vous* and drop the pronoun. With -er verbs, drop the s of the tu form: *Tu parles* becomes *Parle*.

How do you say you don't have to do something?

Say tu n'as pas besoin de or tu n'es pas obligé(e) de. Tu ne dois pas means you must not.

Which tense follows si tu veux?

Use the present or the imperative: Si tu veux, je t'aide. or Si tu veux, viens avec nous. Never use the conditional right after si.