

Rich descriptions with relatives and adjectives

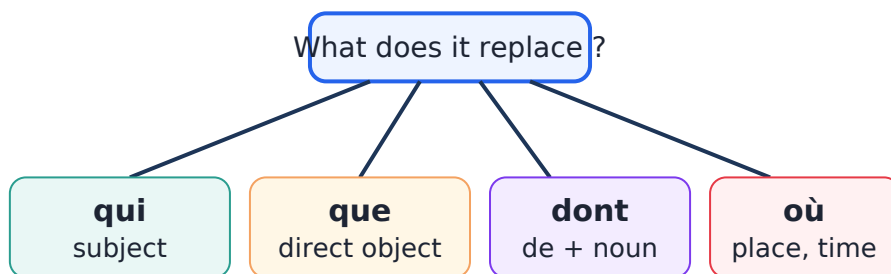
AP French Language and Culture · Lesson

Quick answer: Relative pronouns (qui, que, dont, où, lequel) join two sentences into one elegant description, and adjective placement decides rhythm and meaning. Short, common adjectives of beauty, age, goodness and size usually come before the noun; colors, shapes and nationalities come after.

Level: AP French Language and Culture · **Standards:** AP French Language and Culture (College Board CED), Theme: Beauty and Aesthetics

How do relative pronouns build richer sentences?

Instead of writing two short sentences, French writers fuse them: J'ai visité une galerie. Cette galerie expose des photographies de Dakar. becomes J'ai visité une galerie **qui** expose des photographies de Dakar. — I visited a gallery that shows photographs of Dakar.



Choose by function, not by meaning.

Rule: four main pronouns

- Une femme **qui** peint — a woman who paints (subject)
- Le tableau **que** j'admire — the painting that I admire (object; the past participle agrees: la toile que j'ai admirée)
- L'artiste **dont** tu parles — the artist you are talking about
- Le quartier **où** elle habite — the neighborhood where she lives

What about prepositions and ce qui, ce que, ce dont?

After a preposition other than de, use a form of lequel: le pinceau avec **lequel** il peint, la salle dans **laquelle** nous dansons. Without an antecedent, use ce qui (subject), ce que (object) and ce

dont (with de): Ce que j'aime, c'est la lumière.

Where does the adjective go?

AVANT le nom (BAGS)

beau, joli
jeune, vieux
bon, mauvais · grand, petit

APRÈS le nom

rouge, bleu
rond, carré
sénégalais, québécois

The BAGS rule.

Adjective	Before the noun	After the noun
ancien	un ancien musée — a former museum	un musée ancien — an old museum
cher	ma chère amie — my dear friend	une robe chère — an expensive dress
propre	sa propre voix — her own voice	une chemise propre — a clean shirt

How do you stack both tools in one sentence?

From plain to polished

- *Plain:* Il y a un marché. Le marché est grand. Nous y achetons des fruits.
- *Polished:* Il y a un grand marché où nous achetons des fruits colorés. — There is a big market where we buy colorful fruit.
- *Richer:* Le grand marché de Fort-de-France, dont j'adore l'ambiance, vend des fruits colorés que les vendeuses empilent avec soin.

Each step removes a repeated noun and adds a precise image. In an AP presentational essay, two or three sentences like these carry more weight than a paragraph of short, separate statements.

Common mistake

English speakers drop the pronoun or leave it out entirely. In French you can never omit it: le livre **que** j'ai lu, not le livre j'ai lu. Also, que becomes qu' before a vowel, but qui never elides.

Culture note

The novelist Gustave Flaubert was famous for hunting for le mot juste, the exact word. French readers still prize precision in description, which is why careful adjectives and relatives matter.

Zoé's tip

Look right after the blank. If a subject comes next (je, elle, Léo), choose que. If a verb comes next, choose qui.

Key points to remember

- Qui replaces a subject, que replaces a direct object.
- Dont replaces de + noun: le peintre dont je parle.
- Où replaces a place or a time: la ville où elle est née.
- Adjectives of Beauty, Age, Goodness, Size (BAGS) usually precede the noun.
- Some adjectives change meaning with position: un ancien palais and un palais ancien.

Rich Descriptions with Relatives and Adjectives: frequently asked questions

When do I use qui and when que?

Use qui when the pronoun is the subject of the next verb: le peintre qui travaille. Use que when it is the direct object and a subject follows: le tableau que Léa regarde.

What does dont replace?

Dont replaces de + a noun. It appears after verbs like parler de, avoir besoin de and expresses possession: l'artiste dont la toile est célèbre.

Which adjectives go before the noun?

Short, frequent adjectives of Beauty, Age, Goodness and Size: beau, joli, jeune, vieux, bon, mauvais, grand, petit. Colors, shapes and nationalities follow the noun.

Why does the meaning change with the position of the adjective?

Before the noun, the adjective often has a figurative sense: un grand homme is a great man. After the noun, it is literal: un homme grand is a tall man.

Can I stack several adjectives?

Yes. Place each according to its category: une belle robe rouge or un petit village breton. Join two adjectives after the noun with et.