

Counting things in plural and il y a

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Most French nouns form the plural by adding -s, and that -s is silent, so un livre becomes des livres. Nouns in -eau and -eu take -x, nouns in -al become -aux, and nouns ending in -s, -x or -z stay the same. Il y a means both "there is" and "there are".

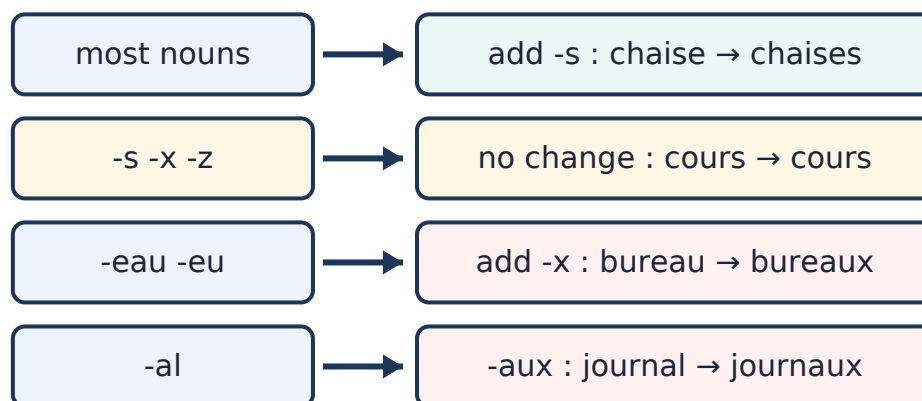
Level: French 1 (high school, ACTFL Novice) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice Mid, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

How do you make a French noun plural?

Rule: add -s

Most French nouns add **-s** in the plural. The little word before the noun changes as well: un and une become des; le, la and l' become les. The final -s is silent, so the ear hears a plural in the article, not in the noun.

Singular ending	Plural	Example
most endings	add -s	une chaise → des chaises
-s, -x, -z	no change	un cours → des cours; un nez → des nez
-eau, -eu	add -x	un bureau → des bureaux; un jeu → des jeux
-al	-aux	un animal → des animaux



Four patterns cover almost every plural.

Which plurals are irregular?

A few words ignore the pattern. Un bal and un festival simply add -s: des bals, des festivals. Un œil becomes des yeux, and un cheval becomes des chevaux. Learn these as vocabulary.

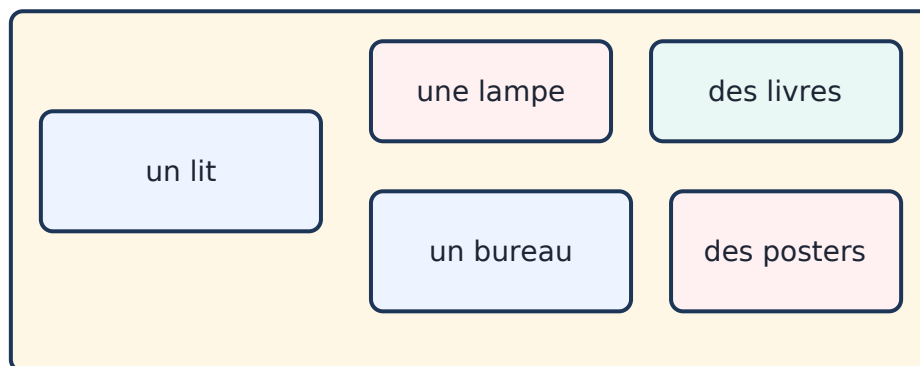
How do you say "there is" and "there are"?

Il y a

Il y a means both "there is" and "there are". It never changes. For the negative, use il n'y a pas de (or d' before a vowel).

Examples

- Il y a un tableau. — There is a board.
- Il y a deux fenêtres. — There are two windows.
- Il n'y a pas de gomme. — There is no eraser.
- Il n'y a pas d'ordinateurs. — There are no computers.



Zoé's bedroom: one bed, one lamp, several books.

Useful objects: un cahier (notebook), une trousse (pencil case), un sac à dos (backpack), une étagère (shelf), un rideau (curtain), une affiche (poster). Ask Qu'est-ce qu'il y a dans ta chambre ? — What is in your room?

Common mistakes

English can leave out "some": "I have books." French cannot: J'ai des livres. Also, after a negative, des turns into de: say Il n'y a pas de livres, never Il n'y a pas des livres. And do not write il y ont: il y a stays the same for one or ten objects.

Zoé's tip

Listen to the small word, not the noun. Le livre and les livres sound different only in the article. Before a vowel, les and des link to the noun with a z sound: les élèves, des amis.

Culture note

In France the school year starts in early September, a moment called la rentrée. Shops fill with des cahiers, des troussees and des stylos, and many families receive a back-to-school allowance.

Key points to remember

- Add -s to most nouns; the -s is not pronounced.
- -eau and -eu add -x; -al becomes -aux.
- Nouns ending in -s, -x, -z do not change.
- Il y a never changes; the negative is il n'y a pas de.
- Des becomes de or d' after a negative.

Counting Things in Plural and Il Y A: frequently asked questions

Is the plural -s pronounced in French?

No. In des chaises the final -s is silent. Listen to the article: une chair versus des chairs.

What is the plural of un cheval?

It is des chevaux. Most nouns ending in -al follow this pattern, but bal and festival add a simple -s.

Does il y a change for plural nouns?

No. Il y a un livre and il y a trois livres use the same verb form. Only the noun and the number change.

When do I use de instead of des?

Use de (or d' before a vowel) after pas in a negative sentence: Il n'y a pas de livres.

What is the plural of un œil?

It is des yeux, an irregular plural. Learn it as a separate word.