

How to ask questions in French

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

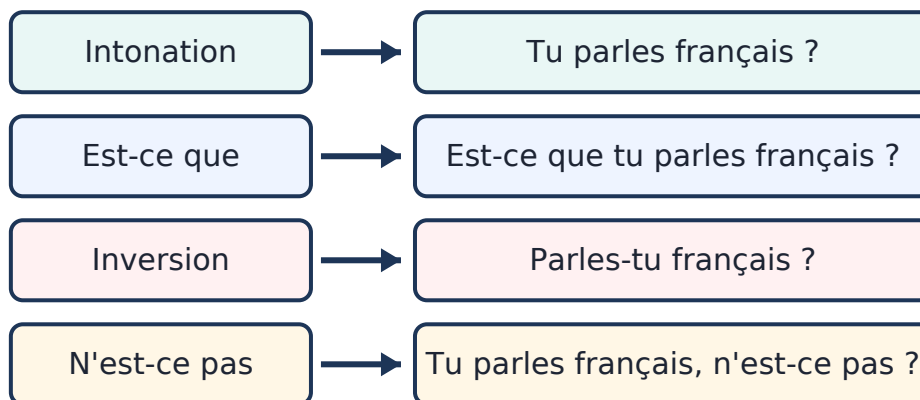
Quick answer: French has four ways to ask a yes/no question: raise your voice (Tu parles français ?), add est-ce que, invert the verb and pronoun (Parles-tu français ?), or add n'est-ce pas. To ask for information, put a question word such as où, quand, comment, pourquoi, qui or combien first.

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 ask a yes/no question?

French gives you four options, all with the same meaning. Pick the one that fits the situation.

Style	Pattern	Example
Intonation	statement, voice goes up	Tu aimes le jazz ?
Est-ce que	est-ce que + statement	Est-ce que tu aimes le jazz ?
Inversion	verb – pronoun	Aimes-tu le jazz ?
Tag	statement + n'est-ce pas ?	Tu aimes le jazz, n'est-ce pas ?



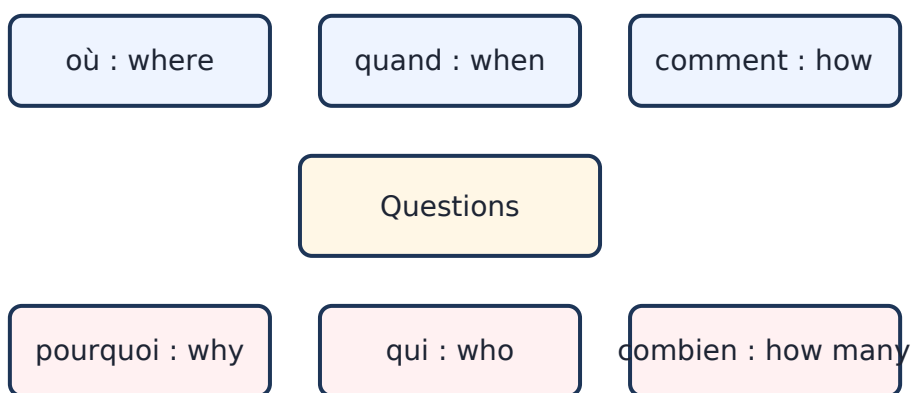
Four ways to ask the same question.

Rule: est-ce que and inversion

Est-ce que becomes **est-ce qu'** before a vowel: Est-ce qu'il joue au foot ? For inversion, join the verb and the pronoun with a hyphen: Parlez-vous anglais ? When a third-person verb ends in a vowel, add **-t-**: Chante-t-elle ?, Aime-t-il nager ?

What do the main question words mean?

Word	Meaning	Example
où	where	Où habites-tu ? — Where do you live?
quand	when	Quand est-ce que le film commence ? — When does the film start?
comment	how	Comment vas-tu ? — How are you?
pourquoi	why	Pourquoi étudies-tu l'italien ? — Why do you study Italian?
qui	who	Qui chante ? — Who is singing?
quoi	what	Tu regardes quoi ? — What are you watching?
combien (de)	how much / how many	Combien de frères as-tu ? — How many brothers do you have?



Six question words around the word Questions.

Put the question word first, then use *est-ce que* or inversion. In casual talk it can also go last: Tu habites où ? To answer *pourquoi*, begin with *parce que*: Parce que j'adore voyager. — Because I love traveling.

Common mistakes

English needs "do" or "does", but French has no such helper: Tu parles français ?, never Fais-tu parler français ?. Do not combine two styles: Est-ce que parles-tu ? is wrong. Write *combien de* with *de*: Combien d'élèves ?, not Combien élèves ?

Zoé's tip

When you are not sure, use *est-ce que*. It works with every verb and every question word, and it never breaks a rule. Save inversion for polite situations such as Parlez-vous anglais ?

Culture note

In France, strangers usually address each other with *vous*. A polite visitor in a shop therefore asks *Parlez-vous anglais ?* and not *Tu parles anglais ?*, and starts the conversation with *Bonjour*.

Key points to remember

- Intonation, *est-ce que*, inversion and *n'est-ce pas* all make yes/no questions.
- *Est-ce que* becomes *est-ce qu'* before a vowel.
- Inversion uses a hyphen, and a *-t-* after a vowel-ending verb: *Chante-t-elle ?*
- *Où*, *quand*, *comment*, *pourquoi*, *qui*, *quoi*, *combien (de)* ask for information.
- Answer *pourquoi* with *parce que*.

How to Ask Questions in French: frequently asked questions

What is the easiest way to ask a question in French?

Say a normal sentence and raise your voice at the end: *Tu aimes le jazz ?* This is natural among friends. *Est-ce que* is a safe alternative.

When do I use *est-ce qu'* instead of *est-ce que*?

Use *est-ce qu'* before a vowel sound: *Est-ce qu'elle chante ?* Before a consonant, use *est-ce que*.

Why is there a *-t-* in *Chante-t-elle*?

When a third-person verb ends in a vowel, the *-t-* separates it from *il*, *elle* or *on*. It is only a link and has no meaning.

How do I answer a question with *pourquoi*?

Begin the answer with *parce que*: *Pourquoi étudies-tu l'italien ? — Parce que j'adore l'Italie.*

What does *n'est-ce pas* mean?

It means "right?" or "isn't it?". Place it at the end of a statement to ask for confirmation: *Tu habites à Nantes, n'est-ce pas ?*