

What time is it? clocks and schedules

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Ask the time with *Quelle heure est-il ?* and answer with *Il est* + number + *heure(s)*: *Il est trois heures*. Add *et quart*, *et demie*, or *moins le quart* for the quarter and half hours. Use *midi* and *minuit* for noon and midnight, and *à quelle heure ?* to ask when an event starts.

Level: French 1 (high school, ACTFL Novice) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice Mid, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 2.1 Cultural Practices

How do you ask and tell the time in French?

Rule: Il est + hour

Ask *Quelle heure est-il ?* (What time is it?). Answer with *Il est* plus the number plus *heure* or *heures*. Minutes follow the hour: *Il est huit heures vingt*.

Clock	French
1:00	Il est une heure .
2:00	Il est deux heures .
3:05	Il est trois heures cinq.
3:15	Il est trois heures et quart .
3:30	Il est trois heures et demie .
3:45	Il est quatre heures moins le quart .
3:50	Il est quatre heures moins dix .
12:00 / 24:00	Il est midi . / Il est minuit .



3 h 15

trois heures et quart



3 h 30

trois heures et demie



2 h 45

trois heures moins le quart

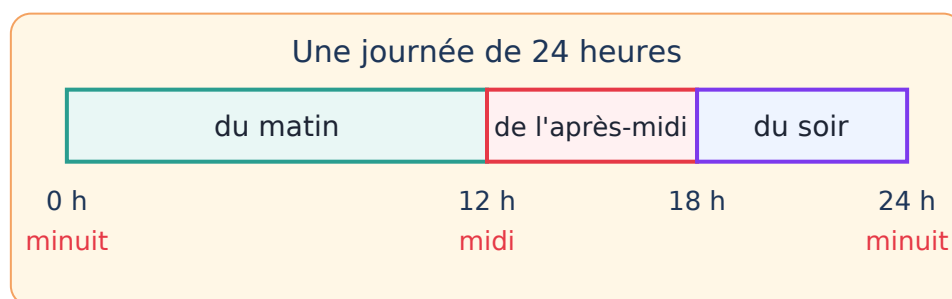
Quarter past, half past and quarter to: the long hand tells you which phrase to use.

Common mistake

English says it is half past three, but French says trois heures et demie with demie agreeing with the feminine heure. With midi and minuit (masculine) write midi et demi, without the final e. Also, never drop heure(s): Il est trois. is wrong.

How does the 24-hour clock work in France?

Train stations, cinemas and TV guides use the 24-hour system. Count straight on after noon: 15 h 30 is quinze heures trente, and 20 h 45 is vingt heures quarante-cinq. Official time does not use et quart or moins. In conversation, people often switch back to the 12-hour clock and add the part of the day: trois heures de l'après-midi.



One day from midnight to midnight, with the labels used on the 12-hour clock.

How do you ask when something happens?

Examples

- À quelle heure est le cours de maths ? — What time is math class?
- Il commence à huit heures dix. — It starts at 8:10.
- Le train pour Annecy part à 17 h 42. — The train to Annecy leaves at 5:42 p.m.
- Nous dînons vers vingt heures. — We eat dinner around 8 p.m.

Culture note

French writes hours with the letter h and spaces, as in 8 h 30, not 8:30. Québec uses the same style. French has no a.m. or p.m.: du matin, de l'après-midi and du soir do that job.

Zoé's tip

For the minutes after 30, go forward to the next hour and subtract: 3:50 is quatre heures moins dix. For official time, just read the numbers.

Key points to remember

- Il est une heure is singular; every other hour takes heures with an s.
- Past the hour: et quart (15), et demie (30); before the hour: moins le quart, moins dix.
- Midi (noon) and minuit (midnight) never take heure, and the half is midi et demi.
- Official French schedules use the 24-hour clock: 15 h 30 is quinze heures trente.
- À quelle heure ? asks when something happens; answer with à + time.

What Time Is It? Clocks and Schedules: frequently asked questions

How do you say what time it is in French?

Say Il est followed by the hour and heure(s), then the minutes. For 4:20, say Il est quatre heures vingt. Use et quart, et demie and moins le quart for the common quarters.

Is it une heure or un heure?

It is une heure, because heure is feminine. After one o'clock, add an s: deux heures, trois heures. The same feminine ending shows up in une heure et demie.

When do I use midi and minuit?

Use midi for noon and minuit for midnight instead of douze heures in everyday speech. They are masculine, so you write midi et demi and minuit et demi.

How do you read 18 h 45 in French?

Official time is read like numbers: dix-huit heures quarante-cinq. In casual speech people may say sept heures moins le quart du soir instead.

How do you ask at what time something happens?

Use À quelle heure ? followed by the event, such as À quelle heure commence le film ? Answer with à plus the time: À neuf heures.