

Replacing nouns: le, la, les and friends

French 2 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: A direct object pronoun replaces a noun that receives the action of the verb without a preposition. The forms are me, te, le, la, l', nous, vous and les. In French the pronoun goes before the conjugated verb, or before the infinitive, or before the auxiliary in the passé composé, where the participle agrees with it.

Level: French 2 (high school, ACTFL Novice High) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice High, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

What is a direct object pronoun?

Definition

A *direct object* answers the question qui ? or quoi ? right after the verb, with no preposition. A *direct object pronoun* takes the place of that noun so you do not repeat it.

Pronoun	Meaning	Example
me, m'	me	Elle m'invite. — She invites me.
te, t'	you (friend)	Je t'écoute. — I'm listening to you.
le, l'	him, it	Je le prends. — I take it.
la, l'	her, it	Nous la regardons. — We watch it.
nous	us	Il nous attend. — He's waiting for us.
vous	you (formal, plural)	Je vous remercie. — I thank you.
les	them	Tu les connais ? — Do you know them?

Zoé mange **la crêpe**.



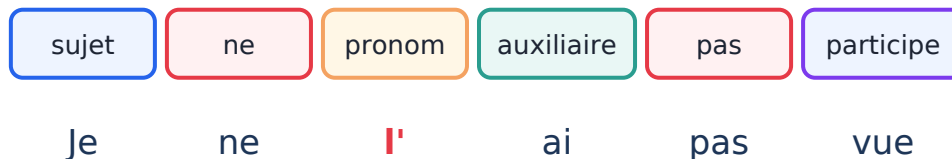
Zoé **la** mange.

The pronoun jumps in front of the verb.

Where does the pronoun go?

Rule: the pronoun stays close to the verb

- Simple tense: pronoun + verb. Je **la** vois.
- Negative: ne + pronoun + verb + pas. Je **ne la** vois **pas**.
- Verb + infinitive: pronoun before the infinitive. Je veux **la** voir.
- Passé composé: pronoun before the auxiliary. Je **l'**ai vue. — I saw her.



I did not see her.

The full chain for a negative sentence in the passé composé.

When does the past participle agree?

In the passé composé with avoir, the participle agrees in gender and number with a direct object placed *before* the verb.

Examples

- Le film ? Je **l'**ai vu. — The movie? I saw it.
- La photo ? Je **l'**ai vue. — The photo? I saw it.
- Les clés ? Je **les** ai perdu**es**. — The keys? I lost them.
- Les livres ? Je **les** ai lu**s**. — The books? I read them.

Watch out

English puts the pronoun after the verb: *I see him*. French puts it before: Je le vois. Also, four French verbs take a direct object where English needs a preposition: écouter (listen to), regarder (look at), attendre (wait for), chercher (look for). So you say Je l'attends, never J'attends pour lui.

Culture note

Choose *te* with friends and classmates, but *vous* with a teacher or with host parents you have just met. Many families will invite you to switch to *tu* after a few days.

Zoé's tip

Put the verb in a spotlight and let the pronoun stand right in front of it. In a two-verb sentence, ask which verb the object belongs to: Je veux voir le film means I want to see it, so the pronoun sits before voir.

Key points to remember

- Forms: me (m'), te (t'), le / la (l'), nous, vous, les.
- Position: right before the conjugated verb: Je la vois.
- With an infinitive, the pronoun comes before the infinitive: Je veux la voir.
- Negation wraps the pronoun and the verb: Je ne la vois pas.
- Passé composé: pronoun before avoir, and the participle agrees: Je l'ai vue.

Replacing Nouns: Le, La, Les and Friends: frequently asked questions

What are the direct object pronouns in French?

They are me (m'), te (t'), le, la, l', nous, vous and les. Le, la and les stand for third-person nouns, and me, te, nous and vous are for the speaker and the listener.

Where do I place a direct object pronoun?

Place it directly before the conjugated verb. With a verb plus an infinitive, it goes before the infinitive. In the passé composé it goes before the auxiliary: Je l'ai vu.

How do I make a sentence with a pronoun negative?

Put ne before the pronoun and pas after the conjugated verb or auxiliary: Je ne le vois pas, Je ne l'ai pas vu. With an infinitive, pas comes before the pronoun and the infinitive: Je ne veux pas le voir.

When does the past participle agree with the pronoun?

With avoir, the participle agrees in gender and number with a preceding direct object: Je l'ai vue for a feminine noun, Je les ai vus for masculine plural. If the object comes after the verb, there is no agreement.

Why can I not say "J'écoute pour la musique"?

Écouter takes a direct object in French, so there is no preposition. You say J'écoute la musique, and with a pronoun, Je l'écoute. Regarder, attendre and chercher work the same way.