

Talking to someone: lui, leur, me, te

French 2 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: French indirect object pronouns (me, te, lui, nous, vous, leur) replace a person introduced by à, as in parler à, téléphoner à or donner à. They go right before the conjugated verb or before the infinitive. Lui means to him or to her; leur means to them.

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 an indirect object pronoun in French?

Definition

An indirect object pronoun replaces a person introduced by à. English often hides it inside "to": "I give the book *to Samia*" becomes "I give *her* the book."



The person after à disappears and lui jumps in front of the verb.

Who?	Pronoun	Example
me	me / m'	Jonas m' écrit. — Jonas writes to me.
you (tu)	te / t'	Je t' envoie la photo. — I send you the photo.
him, her	lui	Elle lui parle. — She talks to him/her.
us	nous	Le prof nous répond. — The teacher answers us.
you (vous)	vous	Je vous montre le chemin. — I show you the way.
them	leur	Nous leur téléphonons. — We call them.

Which verbs take à plus a person?

Learn these verbs with their à: parler à, téléphoner à, répondre à, écrire à, donner à, envoyer à, offrir à, prêter à, montrer à, dire à, demander à.

Examples

Je demande de l'aide à mon voisin. → Je **lui** demande de l'aide.

Mariama prête son vélo à ses cousins. → Mariama **leur** prête son vélo.

Where does the pronoun go?

Rule: position

- Before the conjugated verb: Elle me parle.
- Negative: ne + pronoun + verb + pas: Elle ne me parle pas.
- Before an infinitive: Je vais lui écrire.
- Passé composé: before the auxiliary: Il leur a répondu.
- Affirmative command: after the verb, with a hyphen, and me becomes moi: Téléphone-moi ! A negative command keeps the normal order: Ne lui parle pas !

How do you tell direct from indirect?

Direct (qui ?)

me · te · nous · vous

le · la · les

Je la regarde.

Indirect (à qui ?)

me · te · nous · vous

lui · leur

Je lui téléphone.

Only the third person changes between direct and indirect.

Watch out

English says "listen to her" and "wait for her", but écouter, attendre, regarder and aider take direct pronouns: Je l'écoute. In the other direction, "I call him" has no "to", yet French needs one: Je lui téléphone. Trust the French verb, not the English sentence.

Zoé's tip

Ask à qui ? (to whom?). If the answer is a person, choose me, te, lui, nous, vous or leur. If you can only ask qui ?, choose le, la or les.

Culture note

Students in France usually say vous to a teacher but tu to classmates, so choosing between te and vous matters in real conversations.

Key points to remember

- The six pronouns are me (m'), te (t'), lui, nous, vous, leur; only lui and leur differ from the direct pronouns.
- Lui and leur replace à + a person, never a thing.
- Place the pronoun before the verb, between ne and the verb in negatives, and before the infinitive.
- Affirmative commands put it after the verb: Téléphone-moi !
- Écouter, regarder, attendre and aider take direct pronouns even though English uses a preposition.

Talking To Someone: Lui, Leur, Me, Te: frequently asked questions

What is the difference between lui and leur?

Lui replaces one person (to him or to her) and leur replaces several people (to them). Both come from à + a person: Je parle à Inès becomes Je lui parle, and Je parle à mes amis becomes Je leur parle.

Does lui mean him or her?

Lui is used for both masculine and feminine. Context tells you who is meant: Elle lui écrit can mean she writes to him or to her.

Where does the indirect object pronoun go in a negative sentence?

It stays between ne and the verb: Je ne lui téléphone pas. With a verb plus infinitive, it goes before the infinitive: Je ne vais pas lui téléphoner.

Can I use lui or leur for things?

No. Lui and leur replace people only. When a thing follows à, as in penser à ton examen, French uses the pronoun y instead.

How do I use these pronouns in a command?

In an affirmative command, put the pronoun after the verb with a hyphen and change me to moi:

Écris-moi ! In a negative command, keep the pronoun before the verb: Ne lui écris pas !