

Which one? asking with quel and lequel

French 2 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Quel, quelle, quels and quelles mean which or what before a noun and agree with it. Lequel, laquelle, lesquels and lesquelles replace that noun so it is not repeated. Qu'est-ce qui asks what when the answer is the subject of the verb; qu'est-ce que asks what when the answer is the object.

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

How do you ask which or what with quel?

Interrogative adjective

Quel stands right before a noun, or before être + noun, and agrees with that noun in gender and number. It means *which* or *what*.

Noun is...	Form	Example
masculine singular	quel	Quel sport préfères-tu ? — Which sport do you prefer?
feminine singular	quelle	Quelle chanson écoutes-tu ? — Which song are you playing?
masculine plural	quels	Quels amis viennent à Québec ? — Which friends are coming to Québec?
feminine plural	quelles	Quelles matières aimes-tu ? — Which subjects do you like?

quel un sport	quelle une chanson	quels des amis	quelles des matières
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The adjective takes the gender and number of the noun that follows.

After a preposition the word order stays the same: À quelle heure commence le match ? — At what time does the game start?

How do you replace the noun with lequel?

Interrogative pronoun

Lequel = le + quel. It stands for a noun already mentioned and agrees with it: lequel, laquelle, lesquels, lesquelles. After à it contracts: auquel, auxquels, auxquelles, but à laquelle.

Examples

- J'ai deux billets. Lequel est pour Maya ? — I have two tickets. Which one is for Maya?
- Voici deux robes. Laquelle préfères-tu ? — Here are two dresses. Which one do you prefer?
- Ces photos sont superbes ! Lesquelles viennent de Tahiti ? — Which ones come from Tahiti?

Watch out

English uses *what* for everything. French chooses: *What is your favorite color?* is *Quelle est ta couleur préférée ?*, never *Qu'est-ce que ta couleur....* If a noun follows or is understood, use *quel*.

What is the difference between *qu'est-ce qui* and *qu'est-ce que*?

Subject or object?

Both mean *what*. Use *qu'est-ce qui* when *what* is the subject: a verb follows at once. Use *qu'est-ce que* when *what* is the object: a subject and a verb follow.

Qu'est-ce qui + VERBE Qu'est-ce qui fait ce bruit ?

Qu'est-ce que + SUJET + VERBE Qu'est-ce que tu écoutes ?

Check the word right after the question phrase.

Examples

- Qu'est-ce qui fait ce bruit ? — What is making that noise?
- Qu'est-ce que tu écoutes ? — What are you listening to?
- Qu'est-ce qu'Inès cherche ? — What is Inès looking for?

Zoé's tip

Look at the very next word. A verb after the question phrase means *qui*. A person or pronoun (tu, Inès, vous) means *que*. Think of *qui* as the one who does the action.

Culture

Among friends, French speakers often say *C'est quoi, ton sport préféré ?* instead of *Quel est ton sport préféré ?*. Both are heard daily, but writing and tests expect *quel*.

Key points to remember

- *Quel* has four written forms (*quel, quelle, quels, quelles*) that all sound alike except for the liaison before a vowel.
- *Lequel* is *le + quel*: it stands for a noun already mentioned and changes with its gender and number.
- After the preposition *à*, *lequel* contracts: *auquel, auxquels, auxquelles* (but *à laquelle*).
- *Qu'est-ce qui* is followed directly by a verb; *qu'est-ce que* is followed by a subject, and becomes *qu'est-ce qu'* before a vowel.

Which One? Asking with *Quel* and *Lequel*: frequently asked questions

Does *quel* always agree with the noun?

Yes. *Quel* is an adjective, so it takes the gender and number of its noun: *quel garçon, quelle fille, quels livres, quelles photos*. It also agrees when *être* separates it from the noun, as in *Quelle est ta ville ?*

When do I use *quel* and when *lequel*?

Use *quel* when a noun follows or is part of the question: *Quel film regardes-tu ?* Use *lequel* when the noun has already been named and you only want to point at one of them: *J'ai deux films. Lequel regardes-tu ?*

How do I choose between *qu'est-ce qui* and *qu'est-ce que*?

Look at the next word. If a verb follows directly, the unknown is the subject and you need *qui*. If a subject and a verb follow, the unknown is the object and you need *que* (*qu'* before a vowel).

Why do I write *qu'est-ce qu'* sometimes?

Que drops its *e* before a vowel sound, just like *je* becomes *j'*. So *Qu'est-ce que Théo fait ?* stays the same, but *Qu'est-ce qu'Inès cherche ?* needs the apostrophe. *Qui* never elides: *qu'est-ce qui arrive ?*

Is Quel heure est-il correct?

No. Heure is feminine, so the correct question is Quelle heure est-il ? For the time of an event, say À quelle heure commence le cours ?