

Dont: of which, of whom, whose

French 3 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Dont is the French relative pronoun that replaces de plus a noun. Use it after verbs and expressions followed by de, such as parler de or avoir besoin de, to express whose, of which or of whom, and in ce dont when no noun comes before it. Dont is followed by a subject and a verb.

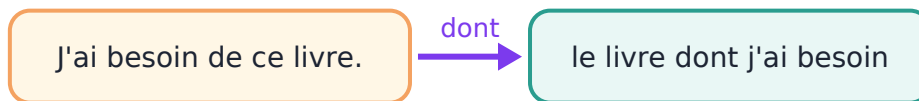
Level: French 3 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Low) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Low, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

What does dont mean and when is it used?

Dont is a relative pronoun that already contains the word de. It appears whenever the clause that follows contains a verb or expression that needs de. In English you translate it as *of which*, *of whom*, *about which* or *whose*, but often the best English version simply drops it.

Definition

Dont = de + the noun it replaces. J'ai besoin **de ce livre**. becomes Le livre **dont** j'ai besoin est à la bibliothèque. — The book I need is at the library.



de + ce livre = dont

Dont absorbs de and the noun after it.

Which verbs and expressions call for dont?

With de	Meaning	Example
parler de	to talk about	Le projet dont Mia parle est génial.
avoir besoin de	to need	Le matériel dont nous avons besoin coûte 40 €.
rêver de	to dream of	Le voyage dont Kofi rêve passe par Tahiti.
se souvenir de	to remember	La chanson dont je me souviens parle de la mer.
se servir de	to use	L'appli dont elle se sert est gratuite.

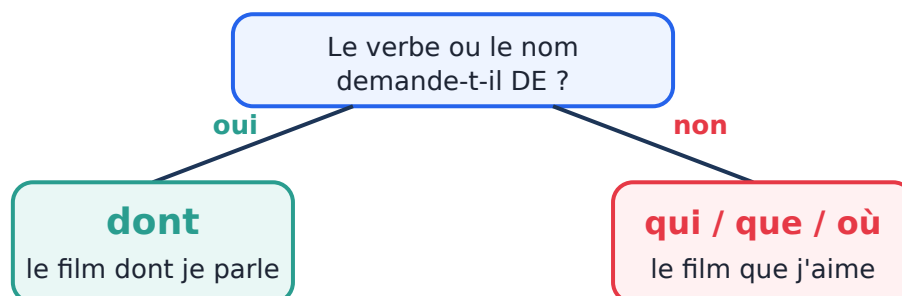
With de	Meaning	Example
être fier de	to be proud of	Le prix dont Anaïs est fière est en or.

Rule

Word order: antécédent + **dont** + sujet + verbe. Do not repeat de after the verb.

How does dont express possession?

Dont also means *whose*. It is followed by the definite article and the noun owned, then the verb: J'ai une voisine **dont** le chien aboie toute la nuit. — I have a neighbor whose dog barks all night. Dont can also mean *among them*: Cinq élèves, **dont** Yanis, partent à Dakar.



Ask the de question first.

What is ce dont?

When no noun comes before the pronoun, French uses *ce dont*, meaning *what* or *the thing that*. Je comprends **ce dont** tu parles. — I understand what you are talking about. C'est tout **ce dont** nous rêvons. — That is everything we dream of. It also follows tout, rien and quelque chose.

Common mistake

English speakers move the preposition to the end: *the book I talked about*. Never write le livre que j'ai parlé de. Say le livre **dont** j'ai parlé. For whose, never add a possessive: un ami dont **le** père, not dont son père.

Culture note

Le Petit Prince, published in 1943 by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, is among the most translated books in the world. It is a classic example of un livre dont tout le monde se souvient.

Zoé's tip

Turn the clause back into a full sentence. If you find *de* hiding there (*je parle de...*, *la mère de...*), the pronoun is *dont*.

Key points to remember

- *Dont* = *de* + antecedent: *le livre dont j'ai besoin* (I need *de* *ce livre*).
- *Dont* also means whose: *un ami dont le père est médecin*.
- After *dont*, put the subject and verb; never repeat *de* or a possessive adjective.
- *Ce dont* is used when there is no noun before it: *ce dont tu rêves*.
- English puts the preposition at the end (the book I need); French moves it to *dont*.

Dont: Of Which, Of Whom, Whose: frequently asked questions

What is the difference between *que* and *dont*?

Que replaces a direct object with no preposition. *Dont* replaces *de* plus a noun. Compare *le livre que j'ai acheté* with *le livre dont j'ai besoin*, because *avoir besoin* takes *de*.

Can *dont* mean whose in French?

Yes. *Dont* plus the article and noun shows possession: *une amie dont la mère est chef*. Never add a possessive adjective after *dont*.

What does *ce dont* mean?

Ce dont means what or the thing of which. It is used when there is no noun before the pronoun: *ce dont j'ai besoin*, *tout ce dont elle rêve*.

Is the word order after *dont* like *que*?

Yes. *Dont* is followed by the subject and the verb: *la ville dont je rêve*. With possession the noun owned comes before the verb: *un garçon dont le frère joue*.

Can I use *dont* after a verb that takes *à*?

No. Verbs with *à*, such as *penser à*, use other pronouns like *à qui* or *auquel*. *Dont* is only for *de*.