

Saving the planet in French

French 3 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: To talk about the environment in French, combine ecology vocabulary such as les déchets, le tri and le réchauffement climatique with il faut que. This expression states what must be done and is followed by the subjunctive: Il faut que nous recyclions le verre. For general advice, use il faut with an infinitive.

Level: French 3 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Low) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Low, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 2.1 Cultural Practices

What vocabulary do you need to talk about the environment?

Eco-vocabulary appears in school clubs, news reports and everyday life in every francophone country. Start with these ten expressions, then add the verbs trier (to sort), recycler, réduire (to reduce), économiser (to save) and protéger (to protect).

French	English
le réchauffement climatique	global warming
les déchets (m.)	waste, trash
le tri	sorting of waste
le gaspillage	wasting (food, water)
une gourde	a reusable water bottle
les transports en commun	public transportation
l'énergie solaire / éolienne	solar / wind energy
la sécheresse	drought
une canicule	a heat wave
la montée des eaux	rising sea level



Il faut trier les déchets !

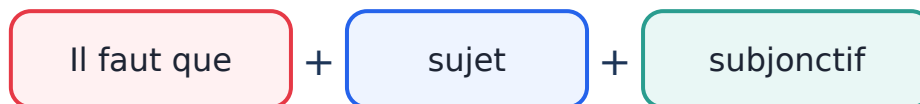
Three sorting bins and what goes into each.

How do you say what must be done with il faut que?

Rule: il faut que + subjunctive

When a specific person or group must act, use il faut que + subject + subjunctive verb. To form the subjunctive of most verbs, take the ils form of the present, drop -ent, and add -e, -es, -e, -ions, -iez, -ent.

Subject	recycler	éteindre
que je / j'	recycle	éteigne
que tu	recycles	éteignes
qu'il / elle	recycle	éteigne
que nous	recyclions	éteignons
que vous	recycliez	éteigniez
qu'ils / elles	recyclent	éteignent



Il faut que les élèves éteignent les écrans.

ils éteignent → que + éteignent

The pattern behind every il faut que sentence.

Irregular verbs

faire → que je **fasse** · aller → que j'**aie**, que nous **allions** · être → que tu **sois** · avoir → qu'elle **ait** · pouvoir → que je **puisse** · savoir → que tu **saches**

For a general rule with no specific person, use *il faut* + infinitive: *Il faut réduire le plastique.* — Plastic must be reduced. For a person: *Il faut que Daouda prenne le tram.* — Daouda has to take the tram.

Common mistake

English speakers say "We have to recycle" and write *Il faut que nous recyclons* or *Il faut que nous recyclier*. Both are wrong: *que* needs the subjunctive, so write *Il faut que nous recyclions*.

Culture note

In December 2015, Paris hosted the COP21 climate conference, which led to the Paris Agreement. In West Africa, Senegal is one of the countries involved in the Great Green Wall, a project to restore land and plant trees across the Sahel.

Zoé's tip

Say *ils* in your head, drop *-ent*, and add the endings. Only *nous* and *vous* keep an *-i-* before the ending: *-ions*, *-iez*.

Key points to remember

- *Il faut que* is followed by the subjunctive when a specific person must act.
- Subjunctive endings are *-e*, *-es*, *-e*, *-ions*, *-iez*, *-ent*; the stem comes from the *ils* form.
- *Faire*, *aller*, *être*, *avoir*, *pouvoir* and *savoir* have irregular subjunctive stems.
- For general rules, use *il faut* + infinitive: *Il faut trier les déchets.*
- Key words: *les déchets*, *le tri*, *le gaspillage*, *la gourde*, *la sécheresse*, *la canicule*.

Saving the Planet in French: frequently asked questions

Why does *il faut que* take the subjunctive?

Il faut que expresses necessity, not a plain fact, and French uses the subjunctive after expressions of necessity. The mood shows that the action is required but not yet done.

When can I use *il faut* with an infinitive instead?

Use *il faut* + infinitive for general rules with no specific person, such as *Il faut trier les déchets*. Use *il faut que* + subjunctive when you name who must act.

How do I form the subjunctive of regular verbs?

Take the *ils* form of the present tense, remove *-ent*, then add *-e*, *-es*, *-e*, *-ions*, *-iez*, *-ent*. For *recycler*, this gives *que je recycle* and *que nous recyclions*.

Which verbs have irregular subjunctive forms?

The most useful are faire (fasse), aller (aille), être (sois), avoir (aie), pouvoir (puisse) and savoir (sache). Nous and vous forms of aller are allions and alliez.

What is the difference between le tri and le gaspillage?

Le tri is the sorting of waste into bins such as glass, paper and plastic. Le gaspillage is wasting something useful, such as food, water or energy.