

Mine, yours, theirs: replacing owned nouns

French 3 (high school) · Lesson

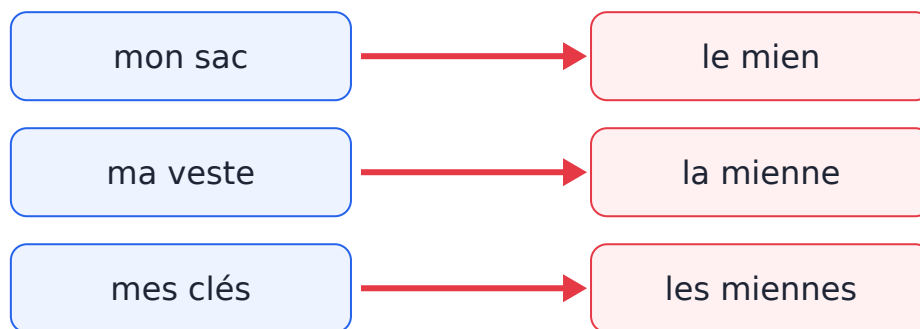
Quick answer: A French possessive pronoun replaces a noun together with its possessive adjective: mon sac becomes le mien. The article (le, la, les) is part of the pronoun, and the whole form agrees with the thing owned, not with the owner. After à and de, the article contracts: au mien, aux tiens, du sien, des nôtres.

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 is a possessive pronoun in French?

Definition

A possessive pronoun stands in for a noun that would otherwise carry a possessive adjective. Ton vélo est rouge, **le mien** est vert. — Your bike is red, mine is green. The article le / la / les always comes with it.



Adjective + noun on the left, one pronoun on the right.

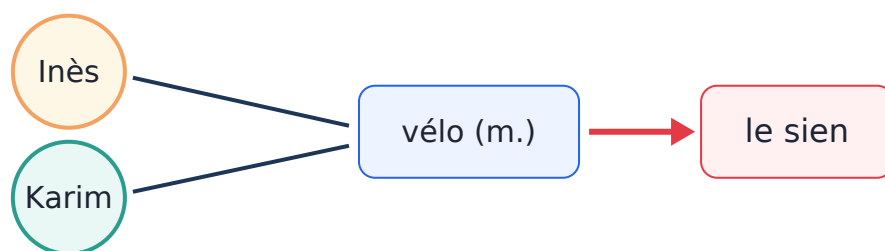
What are all the forms?

Owner	masc. sing.	fem. sing.	masc. pl.	fem. pl.
je	le mien	la mienne	les miens	les miennes
tu	le tien	la tienne	les tiens	les tiennes
il / elle	le sien	la sienne	les siens	les siennes
nous	le nôtre	la nôtre	les nôtres	les nôtres

Owner	masc. sing.	fem. sing.	masc. pl.	fem. pl.
vous	le vôtre	la vôtre	les vôtres	les vôtres
ils / elles	le leur	la leur	les leurs	les leurs

Rule

Pick the owner's family first (mien, tien, sien...), then match the article to the noun being replaced. Inès talking about son vélo and Karim talking about son vélo both say **le sien**, because vélo is masculine.



The noun's gender wins, not the owner's.

How do contractions work with à and de?

The article inside the pronoun merges with the preposition, exactly as with nouns. Only le and les change.

Examples

- Tu penses **au tien** ? — Are you thinking about yours? (à + le)
- Il répond **aux siens**. — He answers his own people. (à + les)
- Elle parle **du nôtre**. — She talks about ours. (de + le)
- Je m'occupe **des miennes**. — I take care of mine. (de + les)
- Nous pensons **à la leur**. — We think about theirs. (no contraction with la)

Common mistake

English *mine* never changes, so learners drop the article or the agreement. Write la tienne, not tienne or le tienne. To say a thing belongs to someone, with no comparison, use Ce sac est à moi; use le mien when choosing among several bags.

Spelling and sound

The adjectives notre and votre have an open o; the pronouns le nôtre and le vôtre have a

closed o, and the circumflex records that difference.

Zoé's tip

Underline the noun you are replacing, check its gender and number, and ignore who owns it. Then glue on the article: that is your answer.

Key points to remember

- The six owners give six families: le mien, le tien, le sien, le nôtre, le vôtre, le leur.
- Gender and number follow the noun that is replaced, never the owner.
- Le sien can mean his, hers or its; context decides.
- À + le/les and de + le/les contract: au mien, aux miens, du mien, des miens.
- Nôtre and vôtre take a circumflex as pronouns; the adjectives notre and votre do not.

Mine, Yours, Theirs: Replacing Owned Nouns: frequently asked questions

What is the difference between mon livre and le mien?

Mon livre is a possessive adjective and needs a noun after it. Le mien is a pronoun that replaces the whole group, so it stands alone in the sentence and takes an article.

Does le sien mean his or hers?

It can mean his, hers or its. The pronoun agrees with the thing owned, so only the context or the previous sentence tells you who the owner is.

When should I use à moi instead of le mien?

Use être à plus a stressed pronoun to state ownership: ce stylo est à moi. Use le mien when you pick one object from a group or compare it with another one.

How do possessive pronouns contract with à and de?

Le and les merge with the preposition: au mien, aux miens, du mien, des miens. With la nothing changes: à la mienne, de la mienne.

Why do nôtre and vôtre have a circumflex?

The accent marks the pronouns and a closed vowel sound, which separates them from the adjectives notre and votre. The plural les nôtres and les vôtres keeps it.