

Giving orders with pronouns attached

French 3 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: In an affirmative French command, object pronouns follow the verb and are joined to it by hyphens: Donne-le-moi ! The direct pronoun comes first, then the indirect one, then y or en. In a negative command, pronouns return before the verb in their normal order: Ne me le donne pas !

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

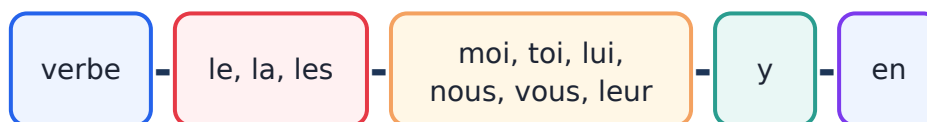
What happens to pronouns in a command?

Definition

The imperative gives an order, advice or an invitation, with tu, nous or vous and no subject pronoun. When the command is affirmative, object pronouns move behind the verb and hyphens link every element.

Affirmative order

Verb, then the direct pronoun (le, la, les), then the indirect one (moi, toi, lui, nous, vous, leur), then y, then en. Before en, moi and toi shrink to m' and t'.



Every piece after the verb is joined by a hyphen.

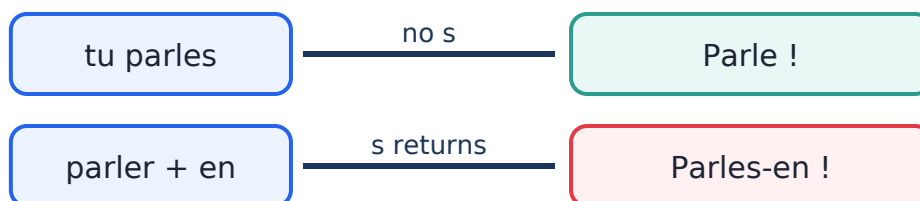
Affirmative	Negative	Meaning
Donne-le-moi.	Ne me le donne pas.	Give it to me. / Don't.
Montre-la-lui.	Ne la lui montre pas.	Show it to her. / Don't.
Envoyez-les-nous.	Ne nous les envoyez pas.	Send them to us. / Don't.
Donne-m'en deux.	Ne m'en donne pas.	Give me two of them. / Don't.
Vas-y.	N'y va pas.	Go there. / Don't.

Common mistake

English says “give me it”, so learners write *Donne-moi-le* or *Donne-moi-en*. French needs *Donne-le-moi* and *Donne-m'en*. Another trap: do not keep affirmative word order in a negative command, as in *Ne donne-le-moi pas*.

How do tu-commands behave before y and en?

The tu-form of an -er verb loses its final s: *Parle !* But before y or en the s returns, so the sounds link: *Parles-en !* — Talk about it! *Vas-y !* — Go ahead!



The final s comes back before y and en.

What are the irregular commands?

Three verbs have their own forms: *être* — *sois, soyons, soyez*; *avoir* — *aie, ayons, ayez*; *savoir* — *sache, sachons, sachez*. Examples: *Soyez-y à huit heures.* — Be there at eight. *Ayez-en toujours deux.* — Always have two of them. Reflexive verbs follow the same logic: *Lève-toi !* but *Ne te lève pas !*.

Reading the pattern

Écris-le-lui. — Write it to him. *Ne le lui écris pas.* — Do not write it to him. The same three words appear in both sentences; only their place and the hyphens change. Check the verb first, then decide whether the command is affirmative or negative.

On the touchline

Fans and coaches in France shout *Allez-y !* to encourage a team, while teenagers use *Vas-y !* as a friendly “go ahead” or “come on” in everyday talk.

Zoé's tip

Translate with “to”: “give it to me” is *donne-le-moi*, because “it” comes before “to me” in both languages. For a negative command, just build the ordinary sentence and wrap *ne ... pas* around it.

Key points to remember

- Affirmative commands: verb, then le/la/les, then moi/toi/lui/nous/vous/leur, then y, then en, all with hyphens.
- Negative commands use the normal order: ne + me/te/nous/vous + le/la/les + lui/leur + y + en + verb + pas.
- Me and te become moi and toi after the verb, but m' and t' before en: Donne-m'en.
- Être, avoir and savoir have irregular imperatives: sois, aie, sache.

Giving Orders With Pronouns Attached: frequently asked questions

Where do pronouns go in an affirmative command?

They follow the verb, joined by hyphens, with le/la/les before moi/toi/lui/nous/vous/leur, then y, then en. Example: Envoie-la-lui !

Where do pronouns go in a negative command?

They stand before the verb in the normal order, between ne and the verb: Ne la lui envoie pas ! Hyphens disappear.

When do I use moi and toi instead of me and te?

Use moi and toi when the pronoun comes after the verb: Dis-moi ! Use me and te before the verb: Ne me dis pas ! Before en, use m' and t'.

Why does Vas-y have an s but Va does not?

The tu-form of aller and -er verbs drops s when alone, but the s returns before y or en to avoid a clash of vowel sounds. That gives Vas-y and Parles-en.

What are the imperatives of être and avoir?

For être: sois, soyons, soyez. For avoir: aie, ayons, ayez. They come from the subjunctive, so they differ from the present tense.