

Linking ideas with qui, que and où

French 3 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Qui, que and où join two clauses in French. Use qui when the pronoun is the subject of the next verb, que when it is the direct object, and où for a place or a time. Qui is followed by a verb, que by a subject, and que triggers participle agreement after avoir.

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 do qui, que and où do in a French sentence?

A relative pronoun glues two short sentences together. It stands for a noun already mentioned, called the *antecedent*, and opens a clause that describes it. The right choice depends on the job the pronoun does inside its own clause, not on the English word.

Definition

The antecedent is the noun just before the pronoun. In J'ai un cousin **qui** vit à Lausanne. — I have a cousin who lives in Lausanne, the antecedent is un cousin.

qui

SUJET

qui + verbe

le chien qui dort

que

OBJET DIRECT

que + sujet + verbe

le chien que j'aime

où

LIEU / TEMPS

où + sujet + verbe

la ville où je vis

Three pronouns, three jobs: subject, object, place or time.

When do you choose qui, que or où?

Pronoun	Job	Next word	Example
qui	subject	verb	La chanteuse qui ouvre le concert vient de Liège.
que / qu'	direct object	subject	Le plat que Fatou prépare sent bon.
où	place or time	subject	Le soir où nous sommes arrivés, il neigeait.

Rule

- Qui never loses its *i*: le garçon qui arrive.
- Que becomes qu' before a vowel sound: le livre qu'Élodie lit.
- Où covers both place and time: le jour où — the day when.

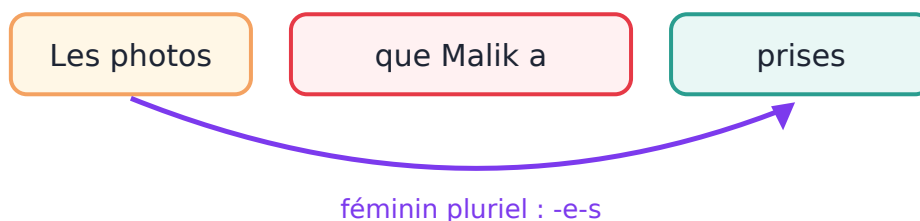
Examples

Voici la boulangerie **qui** vend les meilleurs pains au chocolat. — Here is the bakery that sells the best pains au chocolat.

La veste **que** Malik porte vient de Dakar. — The jacket Malik is wearing comes from Dakar.

How does the past participle agree after que?

With avoir, the participle agrees with a direct object placed *before* the verb. Since que stands for that object, the participle takes the gender and number of the antecedent: Les photos que Malik a **prises** sont superbes. With qui, the verb simply agrees with the antecedent in person and number.



The participle looks back to the antecedent.

Common mistake

English drops the pronoun: *the song I love*. French cannot. Say la chanson **que** j'adore. Also, *who(m)* as an object is que, not qui: la fille **que** j'ai rencontrée. And *the day when* is le jour **où**, never quand.

Culture note

In Québec, many people say la Saint-Jean for the national holiday on June 24. Describing it with le jour où comes up constantly: le jour où tout le monde chante.

Zoé's tip

Test the clause! If the pronoun could be replaced by il / elle, use qui. If it could be replaced by le / la / les, use que. If it means *there* or *then*, use où.

Key points to remember

- Qui = subject of the clause that follows; a verb comes right after it.
- Que = direct object; a subject comes next, and it becomes qu' before a vowel.
- Où = place or time (the day when, the town where); it never changes form.
- In the passé composé with avoir, the participle agrees with the noun that que replaces.
- English often drops the pronoun (the song I like); French never does.

Linking Ideas with Qui, Que and Où: frequently asked questions**How do I know whether to use qui or que?**

Look at the clause after the pronoun. If a verb follows immediately, the pronoun is its subject, so use qui. If a subject and a verb follow, the pronoun is the object, so use que.

Can I leave out the relative pronoun in French like in English?

No. English allows the book I read, but French requires le livre que j'ai lu. A relative pronoun is always expressed in French.

Does où only refer to places?

No. Où also refers to time: le jour où, l'année où, le moment où. It never changes for gender or number.

Why does the participle agree after que?

Que replaces a direct object that comes before the verb. With avoir in the passé composé, the participle agrees with that object: les photos que j'ai prises.

When does que become qu'?

Before a vowel or a mute h: le cadeau qu'elle a reçu, le film qu'on regarde. Qui never elides.