

Having things done with faire and laisser

French 4 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: Causative faire means having something done or making someone do something: faire + infinitive. The subject does not perform the action; it causes it. Pronouns go before faire, the participle fait never agrees, and se faire + infinitive often describes something that happens to the subject, like getting a haircut.

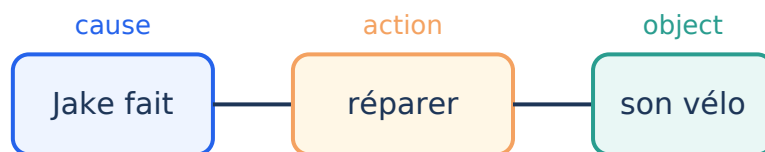
Level: French 4 (high school, ACTFL Intermediate Mid) · **Standards:** ACTFL Intermediate Mid, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational, WL 4.1 Language Comparisons

What does causative faire mean?

In Jake fait réparer son vélo à Montréal — Jake is having his bike repaired in Montreal — Jake does not touch a wrench. Someone else repairs the bike. The structure faire + infinitive covers what English says with *make*, *have* or *get*: one verb, faire, is enough.

Definition

The *causative* construction uses a conjugated form of faire followed by an infinitive. The subject is the cause; a second person, the *agent*, does the action. The agent can be introduced by par or à, or can stay unnamed.



agent : le mécanicien

Who causes, who acts, what is affected.

Which constructions should you know?

Structure	Meaning	Example
faire + infinitif	have something done	Nous faisons peindre la cuisine.
faire + inf. + à / par	make someone do	Mme Diallo fait lire un conte aux élèves .
se faire + infinitif	have done to or for oneself	Léa se fait couper les cheveux.
laisser + infinitif	let, allow	Papa laisse mon frère choisir.

Where do the pronouns go?

Rule: pronouns before faire

Object pronouns stand before faire or laisser, never before the infinitive. With a direct object and an agent, the direct pronoun comes first: le / la / les + lui / leur.

Examples

- Je **le** fais réparer. — I'm having it repaired.
- Il **les** fait rire. — He makes them laugh. (No object after the infinitive, so the agent is les.)
- Je **le lui** fais lire. — I make him read it.
- Ne **le** fais pas venir. — Don't make him come.
- Fais-**le** venir. — Have him come.



Order of the words in a negative sentence with two pronouns.

Common mistakes

English speakers copy *I had my bike repaired* word for word. Say *J'ai fait réparer mon vélo*, never *J'ai eu mon vélo réparé*. Do not put the pronoun on the infinitive (*Je fais le réparer* is wrong), and do not agree *fait*: *Les photos, je les ai **fait** imprimer*.

Culture note

English borrowed *laissez-faire* straight from the French *laisser faire*, "to let things happen". The same structure gives the everyday *faire savoir*, "to let someone know".

Zoé's tip

Count the people. If a second person does the action, think *faire + infinitive* and put every pronoun before *faire*. The infinitive stays on its own at the end.

Key points to remember

- *Faire + infinitive*: the subject causes an action that someone else performs.

- Pronouns go before faire (or laisser), never between faire and the infinitive: Je le fais réparer.
- With a direct object and an agent: le/la/les first, then lui/leur: Je le lui fais lire.
- In the passé composé, fait stays invariable: Je les ai fait réparer.
- Laisser + infinitive means to let or allow; se faire + infinitive means to have something done to or for oneself.

Having Things Done with Faire and Laisser: frequently asked questions

Does faire + infinitive always mean someone is forced to act?

No. It can mean forcing, as in *Le coach fait courir les joueurs*, but it often just means arranging for a service, as in *Je fais réparer mon vélo*. Context tells you which meaning applies.

Why do I say le lui and not lui le?

In French the direct object pronoun (le, la, les) comes before the indirect one (lui, leur). With causative faire, the same order applies: *Il le lui fait lire*. Both pronouns stay before faire.

Does the past participle fait agree with a preceding object?

No. In the causative construction, fait is invariable even when the object comes first: *Les clés, je les ai fait refaire*. This differs from the normal agreement rule with avoir.

What is the difference between se faire couper les cheveux and couper ses cheveux?

Se faire couper les cheveux means someone else, such as a hairdresser, cuts them for you. *Couper ses cheveux* means you cut them yourself. English speakers often mix the two.

How is laisser + infinitive different from faire + infinitive?

Laisser means to allow or let an action happen, while *faire* means to cause it. Pronouns follow the same rule: *Je les laisse partir*, *Je les fais partir*.