

Asking Questions / Poser des Questions

Like in English, there are two broad types of questions in French: **yes/no questions** and **information questions**.

Information questions are the ones that require the use of interrogative words:

who, what, where, when, why, whom, which, whose, how

The interrogative words in French are:

- **qui, que, quoi, où, comment, pourquoi, combien** - *who, what, what, where, how, why, how many*
- **quel/quelle/quels/quelles** - *which*
- **lequel/laquelle/lesquels/lesquelles** - *which one, which ones*

You can also pair “qui”, “quoi”, the variations of “quel” and “lequel”, and sometimes “où” and “combien” with a variety of prepositions.

[préposition] + [interrogative word]

à qui, à quoi, de qui, de quoi, pour qui, avec lequel, duquel (de+lequel), vers où, pour combien, à combien, à quel, pour quel...

Like in English, there are a great multitude of possible combinations. Think of all the different prepositions you can pair with “whom”, for example:

with whom, to whom, next to whom, towards whom, from whom, for whom, etc.

In French, there are essentially **always three ways** to formulate any given **question**. Both types of questions share **two** similar ways of being asked, and each has a **third** unique way. However, it's important to note that there are *natural-sounding* and *unnatural-sounding* ways to formulate questions.

YES/NO Questions

1. Inversion

- Inverting the subject and the verb produces a question
- Inversion is used **infrequently** to formulate questions
- Inversion is used either in very formal contexts, or with the passé composé (avoir), or with the expressions:

peux-tu/veux-tu, pouvez-vous/voulez-vous

Avez-vous vu..? - Have you seen..?

Veux-tu venir chez nous? - Do you want to come to mine?

Veux-tu aller au cinéma? - Do you want to go to the cinema?

Voulez-vous plus de..? - Do you want more..?

Peux-tu le faire pour demain? - Can you do it for tomorrow?

2. "est-ce que"

- Simply adding "est-ce que" in front of an affirmation produces a question
- "est-ce que" essentially functions as "is it the case that..."
- In front of il/elle/on/ils/elles, "est-ce que" becomes: est-ce qu'
- "est-ce que" is used **very frequently** to make questions

Est-ce que tu veux aller au cinéma? - Do you want to go to the movies?

Est-ce t'as déjà vu ce film-là (familiar language) - Have you ever seen that movie?

Est-ce que t'as mangé (familiar language) - Have you eaten?

3. Intonation

Indicating through your intonation at the end of a sentence that it is meant as a question. It involves emphasizing the last syllable of a sentence with a higher pitch.

- You can only use intonation to produce a question with yes/no questions
- Intonation is used **very frequently** to pose questions

Tu veux aller au cinéma? - You wanna go to the movies?

T'aimes ça? - Do you like it? Do you like that?

On va le faire demain? - We'll do it tomorrow?

INFORMATION Questions

1. Inversion

Inversion with information questions simply involves adding an interrogative word to a yes/no question. These are really only used in formal contexts.

2. "est-ce que"

Quand est-ce que..

Pourquoi est-ce que..

Comment est-ce que..

3. Putting the interrogative word at (or near) the end of the sentence

Tu veux quoi? - What do you want?

J'devrais (je devrais) arriver pour **quelle** heure? - What time should I arrive/be there (for)?

Note that the interrogative word is not always at the very end. Some interrogative words need to be paired with a noun or noun clause (a clause that acts as a single noun).

T'as fait ça quand? (passé composé, familiar language) - When did you do this/that?

T'arrives à quelle heure? = You're arriving at what time? = What time are you arriving at?

Tu veux lesquels de ceux qui sont sur la table? (familiar language) = Which ones do you want from the ones that are on the table? = Which ones from the table do you want?

C'est où? C'est quand? C'est comment? C'est qui? C'est quoi? C'est combien? C'est lequel?

Qu'est-ce que je..

Qu'est-ce que tu..

Qu'est-ce qu'il/qu'elle/qu'on..

Qu'est-ce qui...

Particularity of Quebecois French

There's at least one more way of posing information questions in informal/familiar

Pourquoi t'as fait ça?

Comment t'as fait ça?

Particularity of Quebecois French

Though INVERSION on its own is less common than "est-ce que" and "intonation", in familiar speech, people often tend to add a "tu" after the verb, similar to how we do in "inversion", but for any subject pronoun. This is especially the case for short questions.

Tu veux-tu... - Do you want to...

J'devrais-tu... - Should I...

J'peux-tu... / On peut-tu... - Can I... / Can we...

On va-tu au parc demain? - Are we going/shall we go to the park tomorrow?