

How to Ask Questions in French (FLE)

1. Introduction

In French, there are several ways to ask a question. The form you choose depends on **formal or informal situations**, and whether you are speaking or writing.

The main ways to ask questions are:

1. **Raising intonation** (informal spoken French)
2. **Using “est-ce que”**
3. **Inversion of subject and verb** (formal)
4. **Using question words** (who, what, where, when, why, how)
5. **Using compound tenses with auxiliary verbs**

2. Yes/No Questions

2.1. Rising Intonation

- **Informal spoken French**
- Simply **say a statement with a rising tone** at the end:

Tense	Example (FR)	English
Présent	Tu manges ?	Are you eating?
Imparfait	Tu mangeais ?	Were you eating?
Futur proche	Tu vas manger ?	Are you going to eat?
Futur simple	Tu mangeras ?	Will you eat?
Passé composé	Tu as mangé ?	Did you eat?
Plus-que-parfait	Tu avais mangé ?	Had you eaten?
Conditionnel présent	Tu mangerais ?	Would you eat?
Passé simple	Tu mangeas ?	Did you eat? (literary)

2.2. Using “Est-ce que”

- Works in **formal and informal situations**
- Formula: **Est-ce que + statement**

Tense	Example (FR)	English
Présent	Est-ce que tu manges ?	Are you eating?

Tense	Example (FR)	English
Imparfait	Est-ce que tu mangeais ?	Were you eating?
Futur proche	Est-ce que tu vas manger ?	Are you going to eat?
Futur simple	Est-ce que tu mangeras ?	Will you eat?
Passé composé	Est-ce que tu as mangé ?	Did you eat?
Plus-que-parfait	Est-ce que tu avais mangé ?	Had you eaten?
Conditionnel	Est-ce que tu mangerais ?	Would you eat?
Passé simple	Est-ce que tu mangeas ?	Did you eat?

Tip: Word order **does not change**, auxiliary stays with past participle in compound tenses.

2.3. Inversion (Formal)

- Formula: **Verb + Subject pronoun** (for simple tenses)
- Formula for **compound tenses: Auxiliary + Subject pronoun + Past participle**

Tense	Example (FR)	English
Présent	Manges-tu ?	Are you eating?
Imparfait	Mangeais-tu ?	Were you eating?
Futur proche	Vas-tu manger ?	Are you going to eat?
Futur simple	Mangeras-tu ?	Will you eat?
Passé composé	As-tu mangé ?	Did you eat?
Plus-que-parfait	Avais-tu mangé ?	Had you eaten?
Conditionnel	Mangerais-tu ?	Would you eat?
Passé simple	Mangeas-tu ?	Did you eat? (literary)

Tip: For verbs with **être**, the past participle must **agree with the subject**:

- *Est-elle partie ?* → Did she leave?
- *Sont-ils partis ?* → Did they leave?

3. Questions with Question Words

3.1. Common Question Words

French	English	Example
Qui	Who	Qui est là ? → Who is there?
Que / Qu'	What	Que fais-tu ? → What are you doing?
Où	Where	Où habites-tu ? → Where do you live?
Quand	When	Quand arrives-tu ? → When are you arriving?
Pourquoi	Why	Pourquoi pleures-tu ? → Why are you crying?
Comment	How	Comment ça va ? → How are you?
Combien	How much / How many	Combien ça coûte ? → How much does it cost?

3.2. Using Question Words with “Est-ce que”

- Formula: **Question word + est-ce que + statement**
- Works with **simple and compound tenses**

Tense	Example (FR)	English
Présent	Où est-ce que tu habites ?	Where do you live?
Passé composé	Quand est-ce que tu as mangé ?	When did you eat?
Plus-que-parfait	Pourquoi est-ce que tu avais quitté ?	Why had you left?
Futur proche	Comment est-ce que tu vas arriver ?	How are you going to arrive?
Futur simple	Quand est-ce que tu mangeras ?	When will you eat?

3.3. Using Inversion with Question Words

- Formula: **Question word + Verb + Subject pronoun (+ past participle for compound tenses)**

Tense	Example (FR)	English
Présent	Où habites-tu ?	Where do you live?
Passé composé	Quand as-tu mangé ?	When did you eat?
Plus-que-parfait	Pourquoi avais-tu quitté ?	Why had you left?
Futur proche	Comment vas-tu arriver ?	How are you going to arrive?
Futur simple	Quand mangeras-tu ?	When will you eat?

3.4. Using “n’est-ce pas ?”

- Add “n’est-ce pas ?” to confirm statements
- Works with **all tenses**

Examples:

- *Tu as déjà fini ton travail, n’est-ce pas ?* → You’ve already finished your work, haven’t you?
- *Nous irons au parc demain, n’est-ce pas ?* → We will go to the park tomorrow, won’t we?
- *Elle avait mangé avant moi, n’est-ce pas ?* → She had eaten before me, hadn’t she?