

THE INTERROGATIVE FORM IN FRENCH

Goal: Questions are very useful linguistic tools people use to inquire about anything they want. And in this lesson, you will learn how to ask questions in French, too. By the end of this lesson, you should be able to form interrogative sentences by using the “est-ce que” expression or by using the inversion method (verb + subject).

This lesson should be an easy one. By applying 2 simple formulas, you can change any affirmative or negative sentence into an interrogative one.

A – Using the verb + subject formula to ask questions.

To form a question in French, just place the verb before the subject and complete the rest your sentence. So you are simply required to invert the order subject + verb.

By subject in this formula, I mean personal pronouns such as JE, TU, IL, ELLE, NOUS etc... Look below (on same page) for more explanations about what to do when the subject isn't a personal pronoun.

This gives us this formula:

Question = Verb + Subject (Personal Pronouns) + remaining of sentence + ?

[Don't forget to add a dash “-” between the verb and the subject]

Example 1:

The sentence « **Tu parles bien français** » (you speak French well) is in the affirmative form. In order to change it into the interrogative form, we simply invert the order Subject + Verb to obtain Verb + Subject. So the result is “**Parles-tu bien français?**” (Do you speak French well?)

Very important:

- 1- #1. Do NOT use this Verb + Subject formula to ask a question if the subject is JE AND the verb is an ER verb (only) such as parler above. So do NOT say for example: “**Parle-je bien français?**” Use instead the “est-ce que” formula we will learn below.
- 2- #2. Add “-t-” between the Verb and the Subject if the subject is IL or ELLE AND the verb is an ER verb (only). For example donner = to give. “Elle donne un cadeau” = (She gives/is giving a present). When turning this sentence into a question, you should say, “**Donne-t-elle un cadeau?**” = (Is she giving a present)
- 3- #3. If rule # 1 above seems a little complicated to apply, just use the “est-ce que” formula every time when the subject is JE (even for verbs of different groups)
- 4- #4. When the subject of the sentence is NOT a personal pronoun such as JE-TU-IL, ELLE etc...but is instead an actual name, place the actual name at the beginning of the sentence, and then complete your question as if you were using a personal pronoun.

The formula now = Actual name + **Verb + Subject (personal pronoun)** + remaining of sentence.

Example:

“Vanessa regarde un film” will become “Vanessa regarde-t-elle la télé?” where Vanessa is the actual name and ELLE is the personal pronoun corresponding to Vanessa. If the actual name was masculine, let’s say Marc, the question will be “Marc regarde-t-il la télé?” where IL is the personal pronoun corresponding to Marc.

B – Using the “magic” expression « est-ce que » to ask questions.

In order to ask questions in French, you can also use the « est-ce que » expression. In order to do that, simply place “est-ce que” BEFORE the sentence in the affirmative form. I call it *magic* because you can ask virtually ANY types of questions with it, no matter what the tenses, groups or subjects of the verbs are. Let’s see how it works in a real situation. Let’s use the same example 1 above.

“Tu parles bien français” is in affirmative form, right ? To turn this affirmative sentence into an interrogative one, say this : “Est-ce que tu parles bien français? ». So all we did was write « est-ce que » BEFORE « tu parles bien français ». I cannot think of any exception to this rule so far. So go ahead and use it freely.

The Negative-Interrogative Form in French

Well, this was easy. Now, let’s make things a little more complex. Let’s try to change a negative sentence into a negative-interrogative sentence. For example, what if you wanted to ask somebody: “Don’t you speak French well?” How do we do that in French when using our 2 formulas explained above?

Do you still remember these expressions « **ne pas**», « **ne jamais**», « **ne pas encore** », « **ne plus** » that we learned last week or so? We will use them in combination with our 2 formulas to form negative interrogative sentences in French.

1- With the verb + subject formula

The new formula for negative-interrogative sentences will now be:

Ne + Verb + Subject (personal pronoun) + Pas/Jamais/Plus/Pas encore + rest of sentence.

Example: « Don’t you speak French well? » = « **Ne parles-tu pas bien français ?** ».

Please, remember that **Ne** would be **N’** if the verb started with a vowel or a silent h. For example: To like = **aimer**. “Don’t you like French?” = « **N’aimes-tu pas le français?** ».

To live = **habiter**. « Doesn’t she live in Belgium? » = « **N’habite-t-elle pas en Belgique ?** » ?

One more example (I love examples☺):

“Doesn’t she give any present every year anymore?” “**Ne donne-t-elle plus de cadeau tous les ans ?**”

Again for negative sentences, when the subject of the sentence is NOT a personal pronoun such as JE-TU-IL-ELLE etc...but is instead an actual name, place the actual name at the beginning of the sentence, and then complete your question as if you were using a personal pronoun.

The formula now = Actual name + **Verb + Subject (personal pronoun) + Pas/Jamais/Plus/Pas encore + remainder of sentence.**

Example:

“Vanessa NE regarde PAS un film” will become “Vanessa ne regarde-t-elle PAS la télé?” where Vanessa is the actual name and ELLE is the personal pronoun corresponding to Vanessa. If the actual name was masculine, let’s say Marc, the question will be “Marc ne regarde-t-il pas la télé?” where IL is the personal pronoun corresponding to Marc.

Now, let’s see how this works with our magic expression « est-ce que ».

2- With the expression « **est-ce que** »

Again, very easy to do when applying « est-ce que ». Just as above (in affirmative case), place “est-ce que” BEFORE the negative sentence to change it into a negative-interrogative one.

Example:

Tu ne parles pas bien français = *You don’t speak French well.* (Negative form)

Est-ce que tu ne parles pas bien français ? = Don’t you speak french well (Negative-interrogative form).

All we did was place est-ce que before the original sentence Tu ne parles pas bien français.

Wasn’t that easy? 😊

In upcoming lessons we will study Les Mots Interrogatifs (the Interrogative words)

Qui (Who), **que** (What), **quoi** (What), **combien** (How much/many), **comment** (How), **où** (Where), **pourquoi** (Why), **quand** (When). So you will basically be covered when it comes to asking questions in French. Isn’t that *Frenchtastic*? 😊

Now, let’s [practice](#) now what we have just learned.