

THE INTERROGATIVE FORM WITH “QUI”

Goal: The lesson we studied last week (#6) was the first of a series of lessons about the interrogative form in French. In today’s lesson we will learn how to ask questions in French involving “who”.

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to ask questions in French whose main target is the subject of the sentence. You should become familiar with expressions such as “qui”, “qui est-ce que...” and “qui est-ce qui...”

Qui=Who or Whom

Qui is an interrogative word in French used to enquire about the identity of a person in general, or used to target the individual responsible for a certain action.

For example, if I were talking about somebody unfamiliar to you and you were curious enough to ask about their identity, the most natural thing to ask would be “qui?” (who?). Below are a few sentences in French where qui is employed to inquire about someone’s identity.

Examples

- a) Qui est là? (*Who is there?*)
- b) Qui est-il/elle? (*Who is he/she?*)
- c) Qui est-ce? (*Who is it?*)
- d) Qui a déjà reçu un cadeau de moi? (*Who has already received a gift from me?*)
- e) Qui parle là-bas? (*Who speaks/is speaking over there?*)
- f) À qui parles-tu? (*Who are you talking/speaking to*) [here preceded by a preposition]
- g) Qui regarde-t-elle? (*Who is she looking at?*)
- h) Qui vois-tu? (*Who do you see?*)
- i) Qui a volé ma voiture? (*Who stole my car?*)
- j) À qui offres-tu ta voiture? (*Who are you offering your car to?*) [here preceded by a preposition]

Qui est-ce qui (= Qui/Who)

Qui can also be followed by est-ce qui when qui (*who* in this case) is the subject of the sentence and completes the action. For example:

- a) Qui est-ce qui veut recevoir un cadeau? (*Who wants to receive a gift?*) In this translation, you can see that who is the subject of wants. Therefore, you can use the expression qui est-ce qui...
- b) Qui est-ce qui conduit cette voiture blanche ? (*Who drives this white car?*) Again, you can see here that who is the subject of drives. Qui est-ce qui can be used here, too.

Important:

- Qui est-ce qui in the 2 sentences above could have simply been replaced by qui.
- When using qui est-ce qui, the word order **cannot be inverted** as in a real question. For example, in sentence b) above qui est-il? (*Who is he?*), qui is the subject of verb est and

we can also notice that the word order is inverted [est-il?]. However, if you want to replace qui by qui est-ce qui do not keep the inversion and say “qui est-ce qui EST-IL?” This is wrong. You should instead say “Qui est-ce qui IL EST?” (No inversion. Please note that it should have been Qui est-ce qu'IL est, but I just want to clearly show both the subject and the verb). Now can you try the sentence d) and replace qui in it by qui est-ce qui? [answer provided at the end of lesson]

Qui est-ce que = Qui/Whom

Qui can also be followed by est-ce que when qui (whom in this case) is the object of the sentence. For example:

a) À qui est-ce que tu apprends le français ? (Who(m) are you teaching French?) The object of the verb is whom while its subject is you.

b) Qui est-ce qu'ils aiment? (Whom do they love?). Qui in this sentence is the object [or the recipient] of the verb aiment (whose subject is ils).

Important:

- Qui est-ce que in the 2 sentences above could have simply been replaced by qui (+ inversion of word order). For example, Whom do you love? /Qui est-ce que tu aimes? (no inversion here) = Qui aimes-tu? (Inversion). .
- When using qui est-ce que, the word order **cannot be inverted** as in a real question.

Since this lesson is only about the interrogative form in French, we will not study the other function of Qui as a relative pronoun [pronom relative]. This chapter will be covered later on after we study all the interrogative pronouns.

There will be a special lesson on these pronouns in the future.

d) Qui a déjà reçu un cadeau de moi? (Who has already received a gift from me?)

Answer: Qui est-ce qui a déjà reçu un cadeau de moi?