

THE INTERROGATIVE FORM WITH COMMENT (HOW)

Goal: By the end of this lesson, you should be able to ask a question in French that targets the way (how) an action is done. In French, if you need information about how something is done, you can ask a question using *comment*.

HOW → COMMENT

Comment, just like any other interrogative pronouns we have so far studied, can be used in 2 main ways.

1- By using the inversion method

Formula = Comment + Verb + Subject + Rest of sentence

Examples:

a) How do you obtain water? → Comment obtient-on l'eau? (Inversion)

[I know many of you will send me emails asking me why I used on instead of tu as the subject when it says you in English. Here, I wasn't asking the question to anyone in particular but to everyone in general. ON is the impersonal subject in French that describes this notion of everyone without distinction.]

b) How do they manage to do this? → Comment réussissent-ils à faire cela ? (Inversion)

c) How will she get to Belgium? → Comment se rendra-t-elle en Belgique ? [The verb se rendre can mean to get somewhere or to surrender]

2- By using the expression “est-ce que” (No inversion)

Formula = Comment + Est-ce que + Subject + Verb + Rest of sentence

Examples:

a) How do you obtain water? → Comment est-ce qu'on obtient l'eau? (No inversion)

b) How do they manage to do this? → Comment est-ce qu'ils réussissent à faire cela? (No inversion)

c) How will she get to Belgium? → Comment est-ce qu'elle se rendra en Belgique ?

We will study *Comment* in more details when we study the adverbs of manner of French.

HOW MANY/HOW MUCH → COMBIEN

Now, for those of you who like dealing with quantities or who enjoy counting items, you will now learn how to ask how many/how much X there are/is in any set Y. (nice way to put it, huh☺)

Fortunately, in French we won't have to worry about whether the items can be quantifiable (discrete objects such as people, toys, pages, fingers, etc...) or whether the items aren't discrete (water, sand, feelings, etc) because combien doesn't vary in both cases. Moreover, the expression "Il y a" can mean both "there is" and "there are". All you have to know is the nouns you are referring to. Make sense? Not yet? Okay, let me illustrate this in the examples below.

a) Using How many with Discrete items

- 1- How many people are there at the party? → Combien de personnes y a-t-il à la fête ?
- 2- How many glasses are there on the table? → Combien de verres y a-t-il sur la table?
- 3- How many pages are there in this book? → Combien de pages y a-t-il dans ce livre?

Important Note: It's « Combien DE », NOT Combien DES (even if items are numerous).

b) Using How much with Non-Discrete items

- 1- How much water is there in this glass? → Combien d'eau y a-t-il dans ce verre?
- 2- How much love does she have for him? → Combien d'amour a-t-elle pour lui?
- 3- How much sand is there on this beach? → Combien de sable y a-t-il sur cette plage?

Important Note : Combien de + Vowel or silent h = Combien d'.

Asking for the price with COMBIEN... (HOW MUCH)

There can be several ways in French to ask about the value (in money) of an item. Here, I'm just going to show you 2 ways:

Method 1:

a-) Combien coûte... (For a single item)

How much does a book cost? → **Combien coûte un livre?** (Again, this is the inversion method where the verb is placed BEFORE the subject. You can also use est-ce que to ask the same question, but don't forget that you shouldn't invert this time → **Combien est-ce qu'un livre coûte?**)

b-) Combien coûtent... (For many items) Same rule as above, but the number of items is plural. How much do two books cost? → **Combien coûtent deux livres?**

Method 2:

This is a very casual and very common manner among French speakers of asking "how much". You're shopping at a market, and you see an item that you like. Now you want to ask the seller how much it costs. You simply point at the item you like and say in French: "**Combien ça coûte?**" It works even if there is more than one item, as long as you and the seller know which item(s) you are talking about. Or you can also ask: "**C'est combien**", literally "It's how much?" Thank you all!!! Merci à tous!!!