

EVERYTHING ABOUT USING FRENCH ARTICLES



Lesson on using French articles

Understanding articles in French is vital for fluency, **even for advanced learners**. Articles are a core part of French grammar and are often necessary in contexts where they're omitted in English.

For example:

J'aime le chocolat. I like chocolate.

Il joue de la guitare. He plays guitar.

This lesson will explore everything about using French articles in depth: definite, indefinite, and partitive. You'll learn some tricky rules, exceptions, and expressions that don't require articles.

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General Rules for Definite Articles - Forms and Usage

Definite articles refer to specific nouns or general categories.

Form	Usage	French	English
le	Masculine singular	Le chat est sur le canapé.	The cat is on the couch.
la	Feminine singular	La maison est vieille.	The house is old.
l'	Singular before a vowel or "h"	L'arbre est grand.	The tree is tall.
les	Plural (both genders)	Les enfants jouent dehors.	The children are playing outside.

When to Use Definite Articles

Specific Nouns Known to Both Speaker and Listener: Used when the noun is specific or previously mentioned.

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Le livre que tu m'as prêté est intéressant.
The book you lent me is interesting.

La porte est ouverte.
The door is open.

General Truths and Universal Concepts: Used to state facts or universal truths.

La Terre tourne autour du soleil.
The Earth revolves around the Sun.

Les oiseaux migrent en hiver.
Birds migrate in winter.

Unique Entities: Used for unique, one-of-a-kind items.

La Lune brille ce soir.
The Moon is shining tonight.

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Le président a fait un discours.

The president gave a speech.

Days of the Week for Habits:

Le lundi, je fais du yoga.

On Mondays, I do yoga.

Le vendredi, nous sortons au restaurant.

On Fridays, we go out to a restaurant.

Contractions with Definite Articles

Contraction	Preposition + article	French	English
au	à + le	Je vais au parc.	I am going to the park.
aux	à + les	Nous allons aux musées.	We are going to the museums.

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du	de + le	Il revient du marché.	He is coming back from the market.
des	de + les	Ils parlent des projets.	They are talking about the projects.

Special Rules and Exceptions for Definite Articles

Geographical Names With Countries: Used with names of countries, continents, and regions.

La Chine est un grand pays.

China is a big country.

Le Canada est un pays bilingue.


Canada is a bilingual country.

Geographical Names With Cities: Cities typically do not take articles, but a few exceptions exist due to historical gender assignment.

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Le Havre est une ville portuaire.

Le Havre is a port city.

La Rochelle est charmante.

La Rochelle is charming.

Verbs of Preference:

Definite articles are mandatory with verbs like aimer, adorer, détester, and préférer, as these express general likes or dislikes.

J'aime le café noir.

I like black coffee.

Ils détestent le bruit.

They hate noise.

When followed by an infinitive, the article switches to a partitive.

J'aime boire du café le matin.

I like drinking coffee in the morning.

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Nouns Referring to Categories: Used to represent an entire category.

Les lions sont des prédateurs.

Lions are predators.

Le chocolat est délicieux.

Chocolate is delicious.

Indefinite Articles - Forms and Usage

Definite articles refer to specific nouns or general categories.

Form	Usage	French	English
un	Masculine singular	J'ai un crayon.	I have a pencil.
une	Feminine singular	Elle a une idée.	She has an idea.
des	Singular before a vowel or "h"	Ils ont des livres.	They have books.

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General Rules for Indefinite Articles

1. Non-Specific or Undefined Nouns

Refers to an unspecified item or one of many items.

J'ai vu un film hier.

I saw a movie yesterday.

Elle a une amie à Paris.

She has a friend in Paris.

2. Introducing New Information

Used to introduce something new.

Un homme est entré dans la salle.

A man entered the room.

Il y a une voiture garée devant.

There's a car parked in front.

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3. Special Rule: DES → DE with BAGS Adjectives

When a plural adjective precedes the noun (BAGS: Beauty, Age, Goodness, Size), *des* changes to *de*.

J'ai de bons amis.

I have good friends.

Ils ont de vieilles maisons.

They have old houses.

Rule	French	English
Des Before Adjectives: Changes to <i>de</i> when plural adjectives precede nouns.	Elle a de jolies fleurs.	She has (some) pretty flowers.
	Ils portent de beaux vêtements.	They are wearing (some) nice clothes.

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General Rules for Partitive Articles

Form	Usage	French	English
du	Masculine singular	Je bois du café.	I drink coffee.
de la	Feminine singular	Elle mange de la salade.	She eats salad.
de l'	Singular before a vowel or "h"	Il boit de l'eau.	He drinks water.
des	Plural	Nous voulons des pommes.	We want apples.

1. Uncountable or Undefined Quantities

Used for substances or things that can't easily be counted.

Je veux du pain.

I want some bread.

Elle mange de la soupe.

She's eating some soup.

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2. Specificity with "que" clauses

When the noun refers to something specific after *que*, the partitive becomes definite.

Je mange une part de gâteau.

I eat a piece of cake.

Je mange une part du gâteau que tu as préparé.

I eat a piece of the cake (that) you prepared.

3. Abstract Qualities

Il a du courage.

He has courage.

Elle a de la patience.

She has patience.

Special Rules and Exceptions for Indefinite Articles

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Negative Sentences: Partitive articles become *de* or *d'* in negation.

*Je ne veux pas **de** pain.*

I do not want (any) bread.

Exception: After *être*, the article remains unchanged.

*Ce n'est pas **du** lait.*

This is not milk.

Expressions That Don't Require Articles

Some fixed expressions in French do not use articles at all. This is a short list.

Expression	French	English
Faire attention à	Fais attention à la route!	Pay attention to the road!
Avoir raison/tort	Tu as raison/tort.	You are right/wrong.
Prendre peur	Il a pris peur.	He got scared.
Donner lieu à	Cela donne lieu	That causes

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	à confusion.	confusion.
Perdre patience	Elle perd patience.	She is losing patience.
Faire peur à quelqu'un	Ce film fait peur aux enfants.	This movie scares the children.

Fixed Expressions: Learn these by heart as exceptions.

Literal vs. Idiomatic Use: Some phrases drop articles idiomatically.

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