

USING THE PREPOSITION «À» FOR DESCRIPTION



Using the Preposition "À" for Descriptions in French

In French, the preposition 'à' is often used to link an object to a characteristic or feature it possesses, not to be confused with [using the preposition de for description](#). For example, in expressions like 'un sweat à capuche' (a hoodie), 'à' is used to connect the main noun to a characteristic or part of the object. Interestingly, in these descriptions, 'à' remains unchanged and does not take a definite article (like 'la') that would usually accompany a noun in other contexts.

Why Does 'À' Stay the Same in These Descriptions?

When 'à' is used in descriptive phrases, it doesn't simply express possession or location. It introduces a descriptive function, meaning that it indicates a characteristic or feature of the object.

This differs from constructions where a definite article is used, which would refer to a specific part or location. For example, 'à la porte' (at the door) refers to a specific door, not a general characteristic of an object. In contrast, 'à capuche' (hooded) is

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not referring to a particular hood but rather to the general feature of the sweatshirt having a hood.

Common Examples Using 'À' for Descriptions:

1. **Un sweat à capuche** – (a hoodie)

'Un sweat à capuche' describes a sweatshirt that has a hood. The 'à' remains unchanged here, and it's not necessary to add the definite article 'la' before 'capuche.' This structure implies the sweatshirt has this characteristic (the hood), but it doesn't refer to a specific hood.

2. **Un pantalon à rayures** – (striped pants)

'Un pantalon à rayures' describes pants that have stripes. Notice that it's not 'un pantalon aux rayures.' The reason is that 'à rayures' refers to the general feature of the pants having stripes, rather than specifying particular stripes. The use of 'aux' would be incorrect because 'aux' is used to refer to something plural that is specific or located in a defined place. In this case, the stripes aren't defined by a specific context, just as a general characteristic.

3. **Une montre à quartz** – (quartz watch)

'À quartz' indicates that the watch uses a quartz mechanism. This is a technical description, and once again, 'à' remains unchanged.

4. **Une chemise à manches courtes** – (short-sleeved shirt)

'À manches courtes' describes a shirt that has short sleeves. 'À' here introduces the characteristic of short sleeves without

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specifying 'les manches courtes.' The preposition 'à' makes the description simple and natural.

5. **Un livre à couverture rigide** – (a hardcover book)

In this phrase, 'à couverture rigide' indicates the book has a hard cover. The use of 'à' in this case stays unchanged and fluid, because it's describing a quality or characteristic of the book.

Why Not Use 'À La' in These Cases?

If we used 'à la' in these descriptive phrases, it would create confusion because 'à la' implies a specific location or part of the object.

For example:

'Un sweat à la capuche' is not correct. This would imply that the sweatshirt is located at a specific hood (as if the hood were a defined place or location), which doesn't make sense.

More Examples:

- **Un sac à dos** – (a backpack): 'À dos' describes the type of bag, the one worn on the back. No need for 'à le dos,' as it's not specifying a particular back.
- **Une robe à pois** – (a polka dot dress): 'À pois' indicates the dress has polka dots. It's not about a specific set of dots, just a characteristic of the dress.

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- **Une chaussure à talon haut** – (a high-heeled shoe): 'À talon haut' means the shoe has a high heel. Again, 'à' remains unchanged and indicates a feature of the shoe.

Summary of Rules:

1. 'À' is used to link an object to a characteristic or part of the object.
2. 'À' stays unchanged and does not take a definite article in these descriptive constructions.
3. 'À' expresses a general or type-based characteristic, while a definite article (le, la) would be used to refer to a specific part or location.

Conclusion:

The preposition 'à' is a useful tool for adding descriptions in a smooth, simple way without complicating the sentence structure. Understanding that 'à' doesn't change in these descriptive phrases is key to forming correct and natural-sounding French. It allows you to clearly communicate a feature or characteristic of an object without unnecessary articles, keeping your expression efficient and effective.

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