

FRENCH INDEFINITE RELATIVE PRONOUN «CE À QUOI»



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How to Use “ce à quoi” in French

A [relative pronoun](#) is a word like "who," "that," "which," or "what" that helps connect ideas together. It replaces something mentioned earlier (or sometimes something not clearly said) and links it to more information.

A relative clause is a small group of words that gives more information about a person, thing, or idea in a sentence.

Relative clauses help us add details without making a new sentence.

| English Example | French Translation |
|--|---|
| That's what I'm thinking about. | C'est ce à quoi je pense. |
| "what you're talking about" is a relative clause | “ce à quoi je pense” is a relative clause |
| "what" replaces the thing being talked about | “ce à quoi” replaces the thing being talked about |

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What does “ce à quoi” mean?

It means something like:

- “what...”
- “the thing that...”
- “that which...”

... but only when the verb you're using needs the preposition “à” after it.

Why do we need “ce”?

The word “ce” means “this” or “that”, but in these kinds of sentences, it works like “what” or “the thing that”.

We use “ce” when we’re NOT talking about a specific noun, when we’re talking about a general idea, like:

- what I need (it hasn’t been named)
- what she’s thinking about (it hasn’t been named)
- what they replied to (it hasn’t been named)

That’s why we say “ce à quoi” instead of just “à quoi”. The “ce” points to the general idea.

Common verbs that use à (and require “ce à quoi)

penser à – to think about

→ *C’est ce à quoi je pense.*

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→ That's what I'm thinking about.

s'habituer à – to get used to

→ *Ce à quoi je dois m'habituer, c'est la chaleur.*

→ What I need to get used to is the heat.

répondre à – to respond to

→ *Ils n'ont pas compris ce à quoi j'ai répondu.*

→ They didn't understand what I responded to.

tenir à – to care about

→ *Mon temps libre est ce à quoi je tiens le plus.*

→ My free time is what I care about the most.

faire attention à – to pay attention to

→ *Vous ne voyez pas ce à quoi je fais attention.*

→ You don't see what I'm paying attention to.

s'intéresser à – to be interested in

→ *Ce à quoi il s'intéresse n'a rien à voir avec moi.*

→ What he's interested in has nothing to do with me.

s'opposer à – to be against

→ Voilà ce à quoi je m'oppose.

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→ This is what I object to.

participer à – to take part in

→ *Ce à quoi nous participons est un concours national.*

→ What we're taking part in is a national competition.

“Ce à quoi” vs. “Ce que” vs. “Ce qui” vs. “Ce dont”

There are different ways to say “what” in French, depending on the verb.

| | | | |
|------------------|--|---|---|
| ce qui | When it is the subject of the verb | Ce qui me plaît, c'est le chocolat. | What pleases me is chocolate. |
| ce que | When it is the object of the verb, no preposition needed | Ce que tu dis est intéressant. | What you're saying is interesting. |
| ce dont | When the verb or expression needs de | Ce dont j'ai besoin, c'est de silence. | What I need is silence. |
| ce à quoi | When the verb or expression needs à | Ce à quoi je pense, ce sont mes vacances. | What I'm thinking about is my vacation. |

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- **ce qui** = “what” as the subject of the verb (who/what does something)
- **ce que** = “what” as the object of the verb (what receives the action)
- **ce dont** = “what” when the verb needs **de** (something you have, need, or talk about with “de”)
- **ce à quoi** = “what” when the verb needs **à** (something connected to “à”)

Keep it Simple:

- Use “ce à quoi” when the verb needs “à” and you’re talking about a thing, not a person.
- Don’t drop the “à” — keep it inside “ce à quoi”.
- If you're ever unsure, check the verb! Does it use “à”? If yes, you’ll need to use “ce à quoi”.

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