

# FRENCH RELATIVE PRONOUNS

## QUI - QUE - OÙ - DONT



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**Grammar topic:** Relative Pronouns QUI - QUE - OÙ - DONT

**Curriculum:** French Level B2

## What is a relative pronoun?

In this lesson, we will explore the French relative pronouns: qui, que, où, and dont. Relative pronouns are essential in connecting different parts of a sentence and adding depth to our language.

In French, these pronouns serve as the link between a main clause and a subordinate clause, allowing us to express relationships and provide additional information. Throughout this lesson, we will explore the functions and usage of these four crucial pronouns, so you can confidently incorporating qui, que, où and dont into your French communication.

These words are used to link a dependent clause to a main clause.

A dependent clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb.

It does not express a complete thought so it isn't a sentence and can't stand alone.

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French relative pronouns can mean: WHO, WHOM, THAT, WHICH, WHOSE, WHERE or WHEN.  
Unlike in French, we don't always have to use them in English.  
Many times they are optional.  
For example, I could say either "the movie I saw last night" or "the movie that I saw last night".

## QUI

As a question word, QUI means WHO.

As a relative pronoun it can mean WHO or WHAT.

QUI replaces the subject in the dependent clause.

Je téléphone à ma mère.

Elle est en Louisiane.

Je téléphone à ma mère qui est en Louisiane.

I am calling my mother.

She is in Louisiana.

I am calling my mother who is in Louisiana.

In this example QUI means WHO.

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Je vais lire le livre.

Il est dans mon sac. Je vais lire le livre qui est dans mon sac.

I am going to read the book.

It is in my bag.

I am going to read the book that is in my bag.

In this example QUI means WHAT.

QUI can also replace an indirect object, a person, after a preposition.

J'appelle une amie.

J'étais au lycée avec cette amie.

J'appelle une amie avec qui j'étais au lycée.

I'm calling a friend.

I was in high school with this friend.

I'm calling a friend *with whom* I was in high school.

A lot of people don't speak this way anymore in English. However, it is perfectly normal to do so in French.

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# QUE

QUE replaces the direct object in a dependent clause.

A direct object answers the questions WHO or WHAT?

Je fais rôtir le poulet.

Mon mari l'a acheté.

Je fais rôtir le poulet que mon mari a acheté.

I am roasting the chicken.

My husband bought it.

I am roasting the chicken that my husband bought.

Many times the relative pronoun QUE will be followed by a subject or subject pronoun.

Je prépare les légumes.

Mon mari les a achetés.

Je prépare les légumes que mon mari a achetés. I'm preparing the vegetables.

My husband bought them.

I'm preparing the vegetables that my husband bought.

Since QUE replaces a direct object, remember to make agreement with the past participle in gender and number .

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Sometimes sentences can be formed differently, like this one:

Les bonbons que mange mon petit frère sont trop sucrés.

*The candies that my little brother is eating are too sweet.*

Notice the verb MANGE in this sentence is placed before the subject, mon petit frère.

This is not a very common construction.

## OÙ

OÙ can also be a bit tricky.

As a relative pronoun it indicates place as its English translation would suggest.

However, it can also indicate a *place in time*.

OÙ often means WHERE when used as a relative pronoun.

La fromagerie OÙ j'ai acheté le camembert est en ville.

The cheese shop where I bought the camembert is in town.

OÙ means WHERE in this sentence.

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Où as a relative pronoun can also refer to time.

This is where a lot of French students mess up.

Où can also refer to time and it gets translated to WHEN in English.

When referring to time we tend to want to use the word QUAND because it means WHEN.

The problem is that QUAND is not a relative pronoun so you can't use it as if it were.

C'est le moment où...This is the time when...

Would you have been tempted to use QUAND instead of OÙ?

Here's another example:

Il pleuvait le jour où nous sommes arrivés. It was raining the day when we arrived.

## DONT

The last relative pronoun we are going to look at in this lesson is DONT. If you've studied relative pronouns already this is probably the one you don't like very much, but I'm going to simplify it for you.

DONT replaces people or objects that come after DE.

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Tu vois cette dame?

Je t'ai parlé de cette dame.

C'est la dame dont je t'ai parlé.

Here we have an example of a person preceded by DE.

Do you see that lady?

I spoke to you about that lady.

That's the lady I talked to you about. - That's the lady of whom I spoke.

J'ai besoin d'un couteau.

Le couteau est sur la table.

Le couteau dont j'ai besoin est sur la table.

I need a knife.

The knife is on the table.

The knife that I need is on the table.

*The trickiest part about using dont isn't really understanding the rule, but it's knowing which verbs and expressions are followed by de.*

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