

HOW TO USE THE FRENCH PRONOUN «Y»



How to use the pronoun Y in French

The French pronoun Y replaces a PLACE

Here are two examples to get started. You've probably seen these and wondered why the Y is there.

- On y va - Let's go (there)
- Il y a - There is / There are

Y refers to a previously mentioned or implied place.

*Y is not used to replace a person. To replace people you need to use an indirect object pronoun: me, te, lui, nous, vous, leur

Y is normally translated by "there" in English. Many times we don't need to say "there" in English, but you can't avoid it in French. That's why you need this pronoun.

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Y usually replaces a prepositional phrase beginning with a preposition of location like *à, chez, dans, sur,* etc .

Y replaces a preposition (*other than any form of «de»*) + a place or a thing.

Examples

In these examples the pronoun Y means THERE.

Are you going to the bank today? No, I'm going (there) tomorrow.	Tu vas <u>à la banque</u> aujourd'hui ? Non, <u>j'y</u> vais demain. *note that the Y comes right before the verb in the present tense.
She's not going to the mall. She's not going (there).	Elle ne va pas <u>au centre commercial</u> . Elle <u>n'y</u> va pas. *note the placement of ne / pas when using the pronoun Y.
We're going to the store. Do you want to go (there)?	Nous allons <u>au magasin</u> . Tu veux <u>y</u> aller ?

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	<p>*note that when you have an infinitive in the sentence the Y comes right before it.</p>
<p>He was at Jean's house. He was there.</p>	<p>Il était <u>chez Jean</u>. Il <u>y</u> était.</p> <p>*note that even when using another tense like the imperfect the Y comes right before the verb.</p>
<p>They waited in front of the restaurant. They waited (there).</p>	<p>Ils ont attendu <u>devant le restaurant</u>. Ils <u>y</u> ont attendu.</p> <p>*note that in the passé composé the Y comes right before the helping verb</p>
<p>I didn't put the cards on the table. I didn't put them there.</p>	<p>Je n'ai pas mis les cartes <u>sur la table</u>. Je <u>n'y</u> ai pas mis les cartes.</p> <p>*note the placement of ne / pas when using Y with negation in the passé composé.</p>

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The French pronoun Y replaces a THING

Y refers to a previously mentioned or implied thing when that thing is preceded by À, AU, À LA, AUX, À L'

*This can be confusing because you will be tempted to replace a thing by a direct object pronoun. Use direct object pronouns when the thing is not preceded by À.

Many verbs in French are followed by the preposition À, and it is with these verbs that you will often need to use the pronoun Y.

Here are just a few of the most common French verbs followed by À:

- Penser à something (like an idea)
 - Je pense à ton idée.
 - J'y pense.
- Réfléchir à something (like a problem)
 - Tu réfléchis au problème?
 - Tu y réfléchis?
- Arriver à faire something (like homework)
 - Il arrive à faire ses devoirs.
 - Il y arrive.
- S'habituer à something (like living in France)

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- Je m'habitue à vivre en France.
- Je m'y habitue.
- Réussir à faire something (like understanding)
 - Je réussis à comprendre ce qu'il me dit.
 - J'y réussis.
- S'intéresser à something (like history)
 - Nous nous intéressons à l'histoire.
 - Nous nous y intéressons.
- Répondre à something (like an email)
 - Vous répondez à son email.
 - Vous y répondez.

More examples

In these examples the pronoun Y means IT.

I'm responding to a letter. I'm responding (to it).	Je réponds <u>à une lettre</u> . J'y <u>réponds</u> .
He's thinking about our trip. He's thinking about it.	Il pense <u>à notre voyage</u> . Il <u>y</u> <u>pense</u> .
You have to obey the law. You have to obey it.	Tu dois obéir <u>à la loi</u> . Tu dois <u>y</u> <u>obéir</u> .

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Yes, I attended the meeting. Yes, I attended (it).	Oui, j'ai assisté <u>à la réunion</u> . Oui, <u>j'y ai assisté</u> .
I'm going to think about your proposal. I'm going to think about it.	Je vais réfléchir <u>à votre proposition</u> . Je vais <u>y réfléchir</u> .

Restate these questions using Y, then respond both affirmatively and negatively.

Tu vas à la plage?	Tu y vas?
	Oui, j'y vais.
	Non, je n'y vais pas
Tu vas aller à la plage?	Tu vas y aller?
	Oui, je vais y aller.
	Non, je ne vais pas y aller.
Tu es allé(e) à la plage?	Tu y es allé(e)?
	Oui, j'y suis allé(e).
	Non, je n'y suis pas allé(e).

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Ils vont à la plage, eux aussi?	Ils y vont, eux aussi?
	Oui, ils y vont.
	Non, ils n'y vont pas.
Ils veulent aller en Espagne?	Ils veulent y aller?
	Oui, ils veulent y aller.
	Non, ils ne veulent pas y aller.
Tu es allé(e) chez ta copine?	Tu y es allé(e)?
	Oui, tu y es allé(e).
	Non, tu n'y es pas allé(e).
Tu préfères manger chez eux demain soir?	Tu préfères y manger demain soir?
	Oui, tu préfères y manger demain soir.

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	Non, tu ne préfères pas y manger demain soir.
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