

Master “Il y a” in French Present, Past, Future & Conditional



The French expression “**il y a**” is one of the most useful and common phrases in the language. It usually translates to “**there is**” or “**there are**” in English, but it can appear in many different tenses to express time, existence, or situations in the past, present, or future.

Don’t confuse “**il y a**” with “**il a**” (“he has”).

In “**il y a**,” the word *il* doesn’t refer to a person. It’s an **impersonal expression** that means “there is/are.”

1. Present Tense — Il y a

Il y a = *there is / there are*

This is the most common form. It expresses the existence or presence of something in the present.

Il y a + noun / quantity / expression of place or time

- Il y a un chat sur la table. → There is a cat on the table.

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- Il y a beaucoup de monde ici. → There are many people here.
- Il y a du pain dans la cuisine. → There is some bread in the kitchen.
- Il y a trois étudiants dans la salle. → There are three students in the room.

“Il y a” is also used to express “ago”:

- Il y a deux ans, je suis allé(e) à Paris. → Two years ago, I went to Paris.

2. Passé Composé — Il y a eu

Il y a eu = *there was / there were* (a completed action)

Use this tense to describe a specific event that **happened and ended** in the past.

- Il y a eu un accident hier. → There was an accident yesterday.
- Il y a eu une coupure de courant pendant la nuit. → There was a power outage during the night.
- Il y a eu un problème technique. → There was a technical problem.

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3. Imparfait — Il y avait

Il y avait = *there was / there were* (ongoing or repeated in the past)

The **imparfait** describes a **background situation**, something **ongoing or habitual** in the past.

- Il y avait beaucoup de monde au marché. → There were a lot of people at the market.
- Il y avait toujours du pain frais le matin. → There was always fresh bread in the morning.
- Il y avait une belle ambiance à la fête. → There was a nice atmosphere at the party.

Tip:

- Use **il y avait** for a *description* (ongoing background).
- Use **il y a eu** for a *specific event* (completed action).

4. Futur Simple — Il y aura

Il y aura = *there will be*

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Used to talk about something that **will exist** or **will happen** in the future.

- Il y aura une réunion demain. → There will be a meeting tomorrow.
- Il y aura du soleil ce week-end. → There will be sunshine this weekend.
- Il y aura beaucoup de monde à la gare. → There will be many people at the station.

5. Conditional Present — Il y aurait

Il y aurait = *there would be*

This form expresses a **hypothetical** or **imaginary** situation.

- Il y aurait plus de monde si c'était le week-end. → There would be more people if it were the weekend.
- Il y aurait moins de problèmes avec une meilleure organisation. → There would be fewer problems with better organization.

6. Plus-que-parfait — Il y avait eu

Il y avait eu = *there had been*

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Use this tense to describe something that **had existed or happened before another event in the past.**

- Il y avait eu une panne d'électricité avant ton arrivée. → There had been a power outage before your arrival.
- Il y avait eu beaucoup de confusion avant la réunion. → There had been a lot of confusion before the meeting.
- Il y avait eu plusieurs tentatives sans succès. → There had been several unsuccessful attempts.

7. Futur Antérieur — Il y aura eu

Il y aura eu = *there will have been*

Used for something that **will have occurred** or **been completed** before a future moment.

- Il y aura eu trois réunions d'ici vendredi. → There will have been three meetings by Friday.
- Il y aura eu beaucoup de changements d'ici là. → There will have been many changes by then.
- Il y aura eu plusieurs essais avant la réussite. → There will have been several attempts before success.

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8. Conditional Past — Il y aurait eu

Il y aurait eu = *there would have been*

This form expresses a **hypothetical situation in the past**, often with “if” (si).

- Il y aurait eu un problème si tu n'étais pas venu. →
There would have been a problem if you hadn't come.
- Il y aurait eu plus de monde s'il avait fait beau. → There would have been more people if the weather had been nice.
- Il y aurait eu une fête si tout le monde avait pu venir. → There would have been a party if everyone had been able to come.

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Tense	Form	English Meaning	Example
Present	il y a	there is / there are	Il y a un chat.
Passé composé	il y a eu	there was / there were (completed)	Il y a eu un accident.
Imparfait	il y avait	there was / there were (ongoing)	Il y avait du monde.
Futur simple	il y aura	there will be	Il y aura un problème.
Conditional present	il y aurait	there would be	Il y aurait plus de monde.
Plus-que-parfait	il y avait eu	there had been	Il y avait eu un retard.
Futur antérieur	il y aura eu	there will have been	Il y aura eu trois réunions.
Conditional past	il y aurait eu	there would have been	Il y aurait eu un souci.

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