

Qu'on vs Que l'on



Qu'on and *que l'on* mean exactly the same thing: *that one, that we, or that people (in general)*, depending on context. The difference is not grammatical but phonetic and stylistic.

1. What they mean

Both come from **que + on**, where **on** means *we* or *people in general*.

Examples:

- Il faut **que l'on** parte tôt.
- We need to leave early.

- Je pense **qu'on** a raison.
- I think we're right.

In both cases, the meaning is the same: *we have to leave early / we're right*.

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2. Why there are two forms

French avoids awkward or unpleasant sounds whenever possible. The extra “l” in **que l’on** is added purely for **euphony**. It makes the sentence smoother or avoids confusion with another word.

You’ll often see **que l’on** instead of **qu’on** in these situations:

a) To avoid confusion with another word

If the contraction **qu’on** could sound like a rude or embarrassing word, French adds the “l.”

Examples:

- One writes **que l’on** (not *qu’on*) in **pour que l’on** to avoid sounding like *con* (a vulgar word).
- Il faut **que l’on** fasse attention.
- We must be careful.
- Je préfère **que l’on** y aille demain.
- I prefer that we go tomorrow.

b) To make the sentence flow better

Sometimes **que l’on** simply sounds smoother, especially in formal or written French.

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Examples:

- C'est important **que l'on** comprenne bien.
- It's important that we understand well.

- Je veux **que l'on** se voie plus souvent.
- I want us to see each other more often.

c) In writing or formal speech

Writers often choose **que l'on** in essays, literature, or journalism because it looks and sounds more elegant.

Examples:

- Il est essentiel **que l'on** respecte les règles.
- Il serait dommage **que l'on** oublie ces traditions.

3. When to use qu'on

In casual, everyday speech, **qu'on** is far more common. It's short, natural, and what you'll usually hear in conversation.

Examples:

- Tu crois **qu'on** va y arriver?
- Do you think we'll make it?

- Je sais **qu'on** peut le faire.
- I know we can do it.

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- On verra ce **qu'on** peut faire.
- We'll see what we can do.

In these cases, **que l'on** would sound overly formal or stiff in spoken French.

4. Main Takeaways

Context	Preferred form	Example
Everyday speech	qu'on	Je pense qu'on a raison.
Avoiding awkward sounds	que l'on	Il faut que l'on parte.
Formal writing	que l'on	Il serait dommage que l'on oublie.

Both are correct! Choose **qu'on** in everyday conversation and **que l'on** when you want a smoother or more elegant tone.

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5. Quick tip to remember

Qu'on = casual and spoken

Que l'on = formal or to avoid a bad sound

If you're unsure, just ask yourself: *Does "qu'on" sound okay here?* If it sounds awkward or makes you smile for the wrong reason, use **que l'on** instead.

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