

Le français interactif — Les questions, 1^{ère} partie : *Quel(s)/Quelle(s) ? Que ? Qu'est-ce que/qui ? Quoi ?*

We will be devoting the next three *French Accent Magazine* issues on how to ask questions. In French, we have a few different ways to ask the same question, which gives you a choice, but it also means that it can be confusing. To experience real progression in language learning, it is crucial to overcome the lack of speaking confidence barrier, therefore gaining a comfort level in knowing how to ask questions is one of the first steps up the ladder of confident language use.

Today, I would like to focus on the different ways we express “what and which”; it means that we will look at *quel(s)* or *quelle(s)*, *que*, *qu'est-ce que/qui*, and *quoi*. We know it seems that there might be too many possibilities but there is a logic in how, when and why to use each one! Don't worry, the other interrogative words which we will deal with in the two upcoming issues, such as *qui* (who), *quand* (when), *pourquoi* (why), *combien* (how much / how many), etc., will be more straightforward in their usage.

1) *Quel(s)* (masc.)/*quelle(s)* (fem.)

Quel(le) is mostly used when communicating a choice like “which” in English. It is an interrogative adjective and has to agree with what follows it, thus the masculine, feminine and plural forms.

The sentence pattern is: *quel(le)* + noun.

Examples:

Quel vin aimes-tu boire ? = Which wine do you like to drink?

Quelle robe veux-tu mettre ? = Which dress do you want to wear?

Quelles boucles d'oreille préfères-tu ? = Which earrings do you prefer?

Quel(le) can be used with the inversion construction form as is the case above, or with *est-ce que* to make the question:

Quel animal est-ce que tu vois ? = Which/what animal do you see?

Quels profs est-ce que tu aimes le mieux ? = Which professors do you like best?

Quel(le) can also be used directly with the verb *être* (to be). In this case, *quel(le)* is translated as “what”.

Example:

Quelle est votre adresse ? = What is your address?

Note that you will still have to be sure to use the correct form, either feminine or masculine, of *quel(le)(s)* depending on the noun.

Quel(le) can also be used as an exclamatory adjective – used for emphasis. In this instance, *quel(le)* is again followed by a noun and another adjective can also be used for further emphasis. Used this way it means “what” or “what a”.

Note that there is an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence.

Examples:

Quelle *vue* ! = What a view!

Quelle *belle femme* ! = What a beautiful woman!

2) *Que, qu'est-ce que/qui*

Que and its longer form *qu'est-ce que* are interrogative pronouns and are used as direct objects in a sentence. They are used to ask questions about things. As the object of a question, *que* may be used in a sentence where the verb and subject pronoun are inverted or with *est-ce que*.

Examples:

Que *veux-tu* ? = What do you want?

Qu'est-ce que *tu veux* ? = What do you want?

Note: A straight and simplified translation of “what do” is *qu'est-ce que*.

The alternate form *qu'est-ce qui* is used when the “what” of your question is the subject of the sentence.

Example:

Qu'est-ce qui *arrive* ? = What's going on, What's happening?

3) *Quoi*

Use *quoi* when you have a preposition involved (*à, de, dans, avec, etc.*).

Examples:

A quoi *pensez-vous* ? = What are you thinking about?

Dans quoi *mettez-vous le gâteau* ? = What do you put the cake in?

Quoi can also be used for informal questions.

Examples:

Tu fais quoi ? = You're doing what? (instead of *Qu'est-ce que tu fais* ?).

Tu aimes quoi ? = You like what?

Be careful when the pronoun meaning “what” joins two clauses. In such cases, it is a relative pronoun and is used when whatever you are talking about is indefinite or uncertain. Do not use one of the above interrogatives, but use ***ce que***, or ***ce qui***.

Examples:

Je ne comprends pas ce qu'il dit ! = I don't understand what he is saying!

Aujourd'hui j'ai compris ce qui ne va pas au travail = Today I understood what's wrong at work.

Céline Anthonioz

Scénario : Tu fais quoi à Noël ?

<p>Lilly et Jérôme parlent des fêtes de Noël.</p> <p>Lilly : Coucou Jérôme, quoi de neuf ?</p> <p>Jérôme : Je cours comme un fou pour les préparatifs de Noël ! Quelle période de l'année chargée !</p> <p>Lilly : Comme tu dis ! Tu fais quoi à Noël ?</p> <p>Jérôme : Comme d'habitude, le Noël traditionnel avec les deux familles. Avec quelle famille vas-tu le fêter cette année ?</p> <p>Lilly : Puisqu'on l'a fait avec ma famille l'année dernière, on va le faire avec ma belle-famille ce Noël. Qu'est-ce que ta famille va faire à manger ?</p> <p>Jérôme : En général, on commence avec un plateau d'huîtres et je me demande ce qu'ils vont faire comme plat principal cette année... C'est toujours un sujet qui fait parler dans la famille !</p> <p>Lilly : Et tu fais quoi pour le 31 ? Tu vas aller à la fête de Claudine ?</p> <p>Jérôme : Oui, c'est sûr ! Qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire pour confirmer l'invitation ?</p> <p>Lilly : Mais c'est Claudine ! Passe-lui un coup de fil ! C'est tout ! Tu la connais depuis 25 ans ! Qu'est-ce que tu veux faire d'autre ?</p> <p>Jérôme : Ha ha, oui, tu as raison. Je ne sais plus ce que je dis en ce moment. Je crois que je suis un peu fatigué. Bon, j'y vais, allez, Joyeux Noël, Lilly !</p> <p>Lilly : Joyeux Noël, et vas-y mollo !</p>	<p>Lilly et Jérôme are talking about the Christmas Holidays.</p> <p>Lilly: Hi Jérôme, what's new?</p> <p>Jérôme: I'm running around like a mad man getting ready for Christmas ! What a busy period of the year!</p> <p>Lilly: As you said! What are you doing at Christmas?</p> <p>Jérôme: As usual, the traditional Christmas with the two families. With which family are you going to celebrate this year?</p> <p>Lilly: Since we did it with my family last year; we're going to do it with the in-laws this year. What's your family going to cook?</p> <p>Jérôme: Normally, we start with a platter of oysters and I'm wondering what they're going to fix for the main meal this year... It's always a hot topic in the family!</p> <p>Lilly: And what are you doing on the 31st? Are you going to Claudine's Party?</p> <p>Jérôme: Yes, for sure ! What do I need to do to confirm the invitation?</p> <p>Lilly: But it's Claudine! Call her! That's all. You've known her for 25 years! What else do you want to do?</p> <p>Jérôme: Ha ha, yes, you're right. I don't know what I'm saying anymore. I think that I'm a bit tired. Ok, I'm going, Merry Christmas, Lilly!</p> <p>Lilly: Merry Christmas, and take it easy!</p>
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Retour aux bases / Back to Basics

In French, there are two ways to say “yes”: *si* and *oui*. It is a good idea to get familiar with how they are used at the very beginning of your French language learning process so that your answer to questions will be automatic and correct. If you do use the wrong “yes”, the French could easily become confused and will be unsure if your reply is positive or negative.

How do we use them?

Oui is used when someone asks a straight forward question and doesn't contain any negative elements in the question.

Examples:

1) Q: *Est-ce que vous avez une voiture ?* = Do you have a car?

A: *Oui, j'ai une voiture !* = yes, I have a car!

2) Q: *Est-ce que vous connaissez votre voisin ?* = Do you know your neighbour?

A: *Oui, je connais mon voisin* = Yes, I know my neighbor.

Now, if the construction of the question includes a negative and you wish to contradict the negation, then you will need to reply with *si*. When listening to the question, you have to try to identify the negatives such as: *ne... pas* (don't, not); *ne... jamais* (never); *ne... aucun/aucune* (none at all); *ne... personne* (no one), *ne... plus* (not anymore).

Examples:

1) Q: *Vous n'aimez pas ce film ?* = You don't like this movie?

A: *Si, je l'aime beaucoup !* = Yes, I do like it a lot!

2) Q: *Ta fille n'a jamais fait de ski ?* = Your daughter has never gone skiing?

A: *Si, elle a déjà fait du ski* = Yes, she's already done some skiing.

3) Q: *Tu ne connais personne ici ?* = You don't know anyone here?

A: *Si, je connais trois personnes* = Yes, I know three people.

If you answered *oui* to any of the three above questions, then the French might interpret it incorrectly and think that you are agreeing with their negative question; it will be unclear and confusing to them.

If your answer is negative to any of the question is above, that is if you agree with the question rather than contradict it, then you can simply reply with *non*.

Example:

Q: *Vous n'êtes pas anglaise ?* = You're not English?

A: *Non, je suis américaine* = No, I'm American.

Again, when you hear a French question, try to listen for and identify whether a question is negative or positive, which will in turn trigger you to respond either by *oui* or by *si* (or perhaps *non*).

C.A.

Le coin des branchés

Here are a few idiomatic expressions related to humour :

Se fendre la pipe; se fendre la pêche; se fendre la pomme = to laugh and to have a really good time.

se poiler = to laugh (fam., almost vulgar); **une bonne poilade** = a good laugh; **poilant(e)** = funny

se gondoler (fam.) = idem.

se bidonner (fam.) = idem.

être plié en quatre (fam.) = to laugh so much that one gets a pain in the side (literally, to be bent in four).

se dilater la rate (fam.) = idem.

être pété(e) (fam., almost vulgar) = to laugh so much that one cannot stop.

lol = very funny (synonym of “tordant” (adaptation from the English “laughing out loud”).

prendre du bon temps = to have a good time.

payer, s'en payer = idem; **payant(e)** = funny. Ex.: *Il est payant, celui-là !* = He is really funny, this one! ; **impayable** = extremely funny.

Être pince-sans-rire = to have a deadpan sense of humour.

Se chatouiller pour se faire rire = to force oneself to laugh about something that one doesn't find very funny; **chatouiller** = to tickle; **se chatouiller** = to tickle oneself.

Amuser la galerie = to make people laugh; sometimes used in a negative way: to make people laugh because of a lack of substance in what one has to say, or because one wants to avoid discussing important subjects.

And a few French proverbs :

Le rire est contagieux = laughter is contagious; an adaptation of this expression is: *le rire est contagieux, faire la gueule est génétique* = laughing is contagious, to sulk is genetic.

Plus on est de fous, plus on rit = the more, the merrier; also used with irony, for example when several friends gather to do house chores or moving to a new house, etc. The expression has been transformed by the humorist Coluche (see page 14) into : *Plus on est de fous, moins il y a de riz* = the more people there are (on the earth), the less rice they will have (to share).

Il vaut mieux en rire que pleurer = It is nicer/better to laugh about it (any event that may happen) than to cry.

Jean qui rit et Jean qui pleure = to go rapidly from laughter to tears; inspired from Voltaire's poem (*Jean qui pleure et qui rit*), meaning that it is the same person who will be happy one day, unhappy the day after.

Rira bien qui rira le dernier = He who laughs last, laughs best.

Tel qui rit vendredi dimanche pleurera = The one who laughs now will certainly be much less happy later.

Le rire est le propre de l'homme = a famous quote from the French writer Rabelais, in *Gargantua*, meaning that laughing is specific to human beings.

Le rire est une chose sérieuse avec laquelle il ne faut pas plaisanter = a quote from French humorist Raymond Devos, meaning that laughter is a serious matter about which one should not joke.

Les plaisanteries les plus courtes sont les meilleures = the shorter the jokes, the better.