The Definite Article

The definite article in French has four forms and they all mean the.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>le, l’</td>
<td>les</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td>la, l’</td>
<td>les</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Singular

- le garçon – the boy
- l’arbre (m.) – the tree
- la jeune fille – the young girl
- l’actrice (f) – the actress

Plural

- les garçons – the boys
- les arbres – the trees
- les jeunes filles – the young girls
- les actrices – the actresses

The article must be included with the noun, even when there is more than one in succession. *Le pain, le beurre, et le lait sont sur la table.* (The bread, butter and milk are on the table).

When à or de are used in front of a definite article, the situation will change as follows

- à + le = au
- à + les = aux
- de + le = du
- de + les = des

But there is NO CHANGE with l’ or la :

- à + la = à la
- de + la + de la

- à l’hôtel
- à l’aéroport
- à la gare

Use of definite article :

Before a proper name when qualified by title or adjective :

*le président Bush*  
*Monsieur le docteur*
The Indefinite Article

In French it has three forms—un, une, and des—which are organized like this:

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<td>des</td>
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Singular                  Plural

J'ai un frère / I have a brother  J'ai des frères / I have brothers
J'ai une sœur / I have a sister  J'ai des sœurs / I have sisters

The indefinite article is used when you want to say “a” or “an”.

It can also be used as the numeral “one”:

un livre = a book or one book
une orange = an orange or one orange

Use it in front of each noun in a series (even if in English you would not say it after the first noun in a series…see below):

J'ai un cahier, un crayon et une gomme. / I have a notebook, pencil, and eraser.
The Partitive Article

The partitive article is used when you want to indicate a part of a whole. You form it by using *de* + the definite article (remember that….)

\[
\begin{align*}
de + le &= du \\
de + la &= de la \\
de + les &= des
\end{align*}
\]

Again, you’ll use it when you want to indicate part of something and it is usually translated as “some” or “any.”

*manger du pain, de la viande / to eat some bread, some meat*
*Avez-vous de l’argent ? / Do you have any money?*

You’ll also use it in what’s call the simple affirmative, such as the following:

*J’ai du café, de la viande, de l’eau, des bonbons. / I have some coffee, meat, water, and candies.*

You’ll use it, too, in the simple negative (but notice in negative you get rid of the “le” or “la”):

*Je n’ai pas de café, pas de viande, pas d’eau, pas de bonbons / I don’t have any coffee, meat, water and candies.*

**NOUNS**

**GENDER** -- It means *masculine or feminine.*

All nouns in French are either masculine or feminine, even if they are simply things that have no life. Here are some pointers that may either help you or confuse you. I hope they help:

The ending of the noun is not always a sure way to determine its gender.

*le garçon* (masc.) but also *la maison* (fem.)
*l’homme* (masc.) but also *la femme* (fem.)

Yikes!

To make matters worse, some nouns are feminine even when referring to a male person:

*une personne (f.) / a person (whether male or female)*
*une victime (f.) / a victim (whether male or female)*
But then, other nouns are masculine or feminine, depending on the person referred to

_une artiste_ for a male artist
_une artiste_ for a female artist
_une dentiste_ (for a male) _une dentiste_ (for a female).
_une enfant_ (boy baby) _une enfant_ (girl baby), etc.

BUT….

a number of nouns add “e” to the masculine ending to form the feminine:

_une cousine_  
_une amie_  
_une marchande_  

some nouns make ending changings to go from masculine to feminine.
for example the change from _-eur_ to _-euse_.

_un vendeur_ (a salesman) / _une vendeuse_ (a saleswoman)  
_un menteur_ (a male liar) / _une menteuse_ (a female liar)  
_un chanteur_ (a male singer) / _une chanteuse_ (a female singer)

some nouns add _-sse_ to the masculine to form the feminine:  
_la comtesse_ (the countess)  
_la maitresse_ (the mistress)  
_la princesse_ (the princess)

but unfortunately, there are many exceptions to the above:

_un acteur_ but _une actrice_  
_un directeur_ but _une directrice_. (dang!)

However, there are some typical endings that can tip off what is the gender of a noun (but remember, as with just about everything else, there ARE exceptions):

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>-age</td>
<td>-ance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ard</td>
<td>-ation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ement</td>
<td>-ation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-eur</td>
<td>-erie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ier</td>
<td>-esse</td>
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<tr>
<td>-iment</td>
<td>-ette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-isme</td>
<td>-ière</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-issage</td>
<td>-ion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-issement</td>
<td>-oire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-oir</td>
<td>-té</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 Examples:

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---
-tion question

**NUMBER -- It means singular or plural.**

In French (as in English) you generally add –s to the singular to form the plural:

le livre → les livres
la maison → les maisons
l’étudiant → les étudiants

But, guess what….there are exceptions:

Nouns ending in –s, –x, or –z in the singular do not change in the plural:

le fils → les fils (the son, the sons)
la voix → les voix (the voice, the voices)
le nez → les nez (the nose, the noses)

Nouns ending in –al in the singular, change the –al to –aux in the feminine:

les cheval → les chevaux (the horse, the horses)
le journal → les journaux (the newspaper, the newspapers)
le canal → les canaux (the channel, the channels)

Nouns ending in –au, –eu, –eau, or –ou in the singular generally add –x to form the plural:

le château → les châteaux (the castle, the castles)
le feu → les feux (the fire, the fires)
le bureau → les bureaux (the desk, the desks)
le bijou → les bijoux (the jewel, the jewels)

To make matters a little worse, there are some very irregular plurals:

le ciel → les cieux (the heaven, the heavens)
l’œil → les yeux (the eye, the eyes)
madame → mesdames (madam, madams)
mademoiselle → mesdemoiselles (miss, misses)
monsieur → messieurs (mister/sir, misters/sirs)
le travail → les travaux (the work, the works)
The Pronouns

A pronoun is a word used in place of a noun. In English these are such words as: I, you, he, she, it, we, y'all, they, me, him, her, us, them, and so on. French has them to.

We’ll start with the French SUBJECT PRONOUNS (pronouns used as subjects of sentences or clauses)

| Subject pronouns in French |  | 
|---------------------------|--|---|
| je/j’ | I | nous | we |
| tu | you (one person who is a friend, a family member, someone your own age, or a child) | vous | you (plural or formal for one person) |
| il | he | ils | they (all masculine or mixed group of males and females) |
| elle | she | elles | they (all female) |
| on | we, they/people in general, one |

Remember that the French drop the –e on je when it is followed by a vowel or a vowel sound. This is especially important because numerous verbs begin with vowels.

j’ai – I have
j’espère – I hope
j’aime – I love
j’adore – I adore

DIRECT OBJECT PRONOUNS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>moi (me)</td>
<td>nous (us)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>te (you-familiar)</td>
<td>vous (you…plural or singular formal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le/la (him/her or it*)</td>
<td>les (them…whether feminine or masculine)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* because all nouns are either masculine or feminine in French, then sometimes you will have to translate le/la as it—if, for example, the le or la refers to a thing that is not living, like a notebook or a table.
Remember, a direct object is a person, place or thing that receives the action of a verb. For example, in the sentence

**I see him.**

“**him**” is the direct object pronoun because it receives the action of the verb “**see**.”

(What would be the subject pronoun in that sentence? That’s right! “**I**”)

Don’t forget, too, that in French, usually, the direct object pronoun comes BEFORE the verb. So that sentence above would be written in French:

**Je le vois.**

- *Je* = I
- *vois = see*
- *le* = him

How would you say
**I see her.** (?)

That’s right….change the *le* to *la*.

But remember: if you had just been talking about a notebook (*un cahier*) or a table (*une table*), then the *le* might refer to the notebook or the *la* might refer to the table, in which case you would translate the sentence:

**I see it.**

Now let’s take a look at **indirect object pronouns**….?

These pronouns do NOT receive the direct action of a verb, but rather receive indirect action. Here’s an example of a sentence that shows an indirect object:

**I throw the ball to the boy.**

In that sentence the ball is the direct object because it is **what** I throw. The INdirect object is the boy. He isn’t what I throw but he’s **to whom** I throw the ball.

For this reason, in the box below, all of the the indirect object pronouns are translated with “to” in front of them. But…it’s not always “to.” Sometimes it can be “in” or “for” or almost any other preposition.
So, let’s look at our sentence again

**I throw the ball to the boy.**
*Je jette le ballon au garçon.*

So now, if I want to say

**I throw the ball to him….**

It is.

*Je lui jette le ballon.*

Interestingly, because *lui* covers all three third-person singular pronouns (him, her, it), that sentence above could be translated:

I throw the ball to him (or her, or it).
(You would have to know what was said prior to the sentence to know what was being referred to.)

**INDIRECT OBJECT PRONOUNS :**

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><em>me/m’ (to me)</em></td>
<td><em>nous (to us)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>te/t’ (to you-familiar)</em></td>
<td><em>vous (to you…plural or singular formal)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>lui (to him/to her or to it)</em></td>
<td><em>leur (to them…whether feminine or masculine)</em></td>
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