

Qui? and Que?

The French equivalents of *who(m)* and *what* vary, according to whether the question word is the subject or object of the verb.

When who is the subject of the sentence, its French equivalent is **qui**. Since **qui** is the subject, no inversion of subject and verb takes place.

Qui travaille dans ce bureau?	Who works in this office?
Qui cherche un appartement?	Who's looking for an apartment?
Qui connaît le nouveau conseiller?	Who knows the new consultant?

Qui may be replaced by **qui est-ce qui**, especially in speech.

Qui est-ce qui chante si faux?	Who's singing so off-key?
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When who(m) is the direct object of the verb, its French equivalent is **qui**, followed by the inversion of the verb and the subject pronoun. This construction is characteristic of formal style.

Qui recommandez-vous?	Who(m)* do you recommend?
Qui appelle-t-il?	Who(m) is he calling?

In all styles, **qui est-ce que** (**qui est-ce qu'** before a vowel) can be used for *who(m)*.

Qui est-ce que vous recommandez?	Who(m) do you recommend?
Qui est-ce qu'il appelle?	Who(m) is he calling?

When what is the subject of a sentence, its French equivalent is **qu'est-ce qui**.

Qu'est-ce qui vous intéresse?	What interests you?
Qu'est-ce qui attire l'attention des clients?	What attracts the customers' attention?

When what is the direct object of the verb, its French equivalent is **qu'est-ce que** (**qu'est-ce qu'** before a vowel).

Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait?	What did you do?
Qu'est-ce qu'elles ont acheté?	What did they buy?
Qu'est-ce que j'ai dit?	What did I say?

In formal style, **qu'est-ce que** may be replaced by **que**, and the subject pronoun and verb are inverted.

Que choisissez-vous?	What are you selecting?
Que devons-nous faire maintenant?	What should we do now?

*The *m* of *whom* is put in parentheses since this form is receding in modern English in favor of *who*.

When WHO
is the
SUBJECT

When WHOM
is the
OBJECT

When WHAT
is the
SUBJECT

When WHAT
is the
OBJECT

If the subject is a noun, **qu'est-ce que** is more common.*

Qu'est-ce que la secrétaire a envoyé?	What did the secretary send?
Qu'est-ce que le chef a décidé de faire?	What did the boss decide to do?

Qui may be used after prepositions, but **que** must be replaced by **quoi** when it is the object of a preposition.

À qui est-ce que vous avez prêté le livre?	} Who(m) did you lend the book to?
À qui avez-vous prêté le livre?	
De qui est-ce que vous parlez?	} Who(m) are you talking about?
De qui parlez-vous?	
Avec qui est-ce que notre équipe va travailler?	} Who(m) is our team going to work with?
Avec qui notre équipe va-t-elle travailler?	

A **quoi** ressemble le business-plan parfait?

De quoi est-ce que les enfants ont peur?	} What are the children afraid of?
De quoi les enfants ont-ils peur?	
Sur quoi est-ce que les syndicats insistent?	} What do the unions insist on?
Sur quoi les syndicats insistent-ils?	

Here is a summary chart of the French equivalents of *who(m)* and *what*.

	SUBJECT	OBJECT	AFTER A PREPOSITION
Who(m)?	Qui? / Qui est-ce qui?	Qui? / Qui est-ce que?	qui
What?	Qu'est-ce qui?	Que? / Qu'est-ce que?	quoi

Other Question Words

Other question words can be used with **est-ce que** in all styles or with inversion of the verb and subject pronoun in very formal style.

Pourquoi est-ce que vous ne travaillez pas?	} Why aren't you working?
Pourquoi ne travaillez-vous pas?	
Quand est-ce qu'il prend ses vacances?	} When is he taking his vacation?
Quand prend-il ses vacances?	
Quand est-ce qu'elles arrivent?	} When are they arriving?
Quand arrivent-elles?	

*The inversion of *je* with a monosyllabic verb form ending in a vowel (see the footnote on page 43) may be found in formal French after question words.

Qu'ai-je fait?	What have I done?
Quand puis-je partir?	When can I leave?
Où suis-je?	Where am I?
Quelles questions dois-je poser?	What questions should I ask?
Que vais-je faire?	What am I going to do?

(continued)

WHOM after
a preposition
(ind. obj.)

WHAT after
a preposition
(ind. obj.)

SUMMARY