



## THE CORRECT USE OF PRONOUNS AND ARTICLES ACCORDING TO THE STYLISTIC NORMS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This article explores the stylistic rules governing the use of articles (definite, indefinite, and partitive) and pronouns (personal, object, and adverbial) in French. It highlights key differences from English, such as the obligatory use of the definite article for generalizations and the strict word order for multiple object pronouns. The paper emphasizes common stylistic pitfalls, including the reduction of articles to *de* after negation and quantity, and the use of adverbial pronouns *y* and *en*. Mastering these elements is crucial for achieving fluency and stylistic accuracy.

**Keywords:** French Grammar, Articles, Definite Article, Partitive Article, Pronouns, Object Pronouns, Adverbial Pronouns, Stylistic Norms, *Y*, *En*.

In French, nouns rarely stand alone. Unlike in languages such as English, where articles are often used selectively, or in Slavic languages, where they are absent, articles and pronouns are indispensable structural and stylistic components of French grammar.

Their correct usage is not merely a matter of grammatical accuracy but is central to achieving a native-like fluency and stylistic elegance. Mastering the subtleties of *le*, *la*, *des*, *du* and the placement of object pronouns is arguably the single biggest hurdle for advanced learners seeking to refine their expression according to established stylistic norms. This extensive guide breaks down these rules, highlighting the stylistic implications and common pitfalls.

### The Essential Subtleties of French Articles

French utilizes three main types of articles—Definite (*le*, *la*, *les*), Indefinite (*un*, *une*, *des*), and Partitive (*du*, *de la*, *des*)—each carrying a specific nuance that dictates its stylistic use.

The definite article is used far more frequently in French than "the" is in English. Stylistically, this usage signals generalization, abstraction, or an entire category.

Function	French Stylistic Usage	Example (French vs. English)	Stylistic Note
<b>Generalization</b>	Used with nouns referring to an entire class or concept.	<i>J'aime le chocolat.</i> (I like chocolate.)	Essential for expressing opinions about things in general.
<b>Abstract Nouns</b>	Mandatory for abstract concepts.	<i>La patience est une vertu.</i> (Patience is a virtue.)	Abstract nouns virtually always require a definite article.
<b>Time/Date</b>	Used with days of the week to denote habitual action.	<i>Le lundi, je fais du sport.</i> (On Mondays, I exercise.)	Signifies repetition, often preferred over <i>chaque</i> .
<b>Possessive Replacement</b>	Used with body parts, clothes, and abstract states when the possession is clear from the context (often via a reflexive verb).	<i>Il s'est cassé la jambe.</i> (He broke his leg.)	A core stylistic difference from English's possessive adjectives.
<b>Geographical Names</b>	Mandatory for most countries, regions, and continents.	<i>La France, le Canada, l'Europe.</i>	This is non-negotiable for most proper geographic nouns.

**The Stylistic Impact of *Le/La*:** Using *le* or *la* correctly when generalizing (*Le football est populaire*) demonstrates a clear mastery of the language's fundamental approach to categorization. Failing to do so often results in awkward Anglicisms (e.g., saying *J'aime chocolat*).

The partitive article (*du* (de + le), *de la*, *de l'*) is used to denote an unspecified or immeasurable quantity of something.

*Je veux **du** pain.* (I want some bread/some of the bread.)

*Elle boit **de la** bière.* (She drinks some beer/beer.)

Stylistically, the partitive article functions as a signal of **indefiniteness in quantity**. It is crucial for discussions of food, weather, or resources.

The most significant stylistic divergence in article usage involves the contraction of the partitive or indefinite article to a simple *de* (or *d'* before a vowel) in specific contexts:

After a verb is negated (especially with *ne...pas*), the indefinite (*un/une/des*) and partitive (*du/de la/des*) articles almost always become *de*.

*J'ai **des** amis.* \*Je n'ai pas \*\*d'\*amis. (I don't have friends.)

*Il boit **du** vin. Il ne boit pas **de** vin.* (He doesn't drink wine.)

**Stylistic Exception (Emphasis/Contrast):** The article is retained if the negation is meant to be highly emphatic or contrastive.

*Je n'ai pas **un** ami, j'en ai dix!* (I don't have *one* friend, I have ten!)

Most expressions of quantity (e.g., *beaucoup de*, *peu de*, *trop de*, *assez de*, *une bouteille de*) are followed immediately by *de* (or *d'*), **without** any article following it.

*J'ai **beaucoup de** travail.* (Not *beaucoup des travaux*.)

\*Il y a \*\*trop d'\*erreurs. (Not *trop des erreurs*.)

When an indefinite article (*des*) is used before a plural noun that is preceded by an adjective, *des* is usually reduced to *de*. This is considered a mark of formal, established style, though *des* is often used in informal speech.

*Elle a **de** beaux yeux.* (She has beautiful eyes.) - **Preferred formal style.**

*Elle a **des** beaux yeux.* (More common in casual speech.)

## **Navigating the French Pronoun System: Word Order and Function**

French pronouns are complex because their placement is rigid and determined by function (Subject, Direct Object, Indirect Object, Reflexive, or Adverbial). Mastery of the correct order is a cornerstone of advanced French style.

In French, object pronouns (COD, COI, Reflexive) are almost always placed **before** the conjugated verb, except in the affirmative imperative.

*Je **le** vois.* (I see him/it.)

\*Il \*\*m'\*a donné la clé. (He gave me the key.)

**Stylistic Necessity:** This inverted syntax is mandatory. Failure to use it (e.g., *Je vois lui*) marks a speaker as a non-native and is stylistically incorrect in all contexts except for emphasis (*Moi, je vois!*).

When a single verb governs multiple object pronouns (e.g., Direct and Indirect), their order is strictly governed by a specific sequence, which is crucial for stylistic clarity. The general stylistic pattern (excluding the imperative) is:

Subject	Me, Te, Se, Nous, Vous (Reflexive/COI)	Le, La, Les (COD)	Lui, Leur (COI)	Y, En (Adverbial)
<i>Je</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>lui</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>donne.</i>
<i>I</i>	<i>(it)</i>	<i>(to him)</i>	<i>(some)</i>	<i>give.</i>

### The Key Order Rules:

1. Reflexive/COI pronouns (*me, te, se, nous, vous*) always come first.
2. The Direct Object (COD: *le, la, les*) always comes before the Indirect Object (COI: *lui, leur*).
3. The adverbial pronouns *y* and *en* always come last.

**Example:** *Tu le lui as donné.* (You gave **it to him**.) *Stylistic observation: The French sentence structure requires the object pronouns to be clustered directly before the auxiliary verb, as donné, which is extremely important for achieving the correct pace and rhythm of the language.*

These two pronouns are stylistic workhorses, offering concise substitutes for prepositional phrases, which is essential for elegant, non-repetitive prose.

*Y* replaces a phrase introduced by the preposition *à* (or *dans, sur, chez*) that refers to a **thing** or **place**.

*Je vais à Paris. J'y vais.* (I am going **there**.)

*Il pense à ce problème. Il y pense.* (He is thinking **about it**.)

*En* is the most versatile and stylistically necessary adverbial pronoun. It replaces:

1. **Partitive/Indefinite Nouns:** Nouns introduced by *du, de la, des, un, une*.  
*Tu as du courage? Oui, j'en ai.* (Yes, I have some.)
2. **Phrases of Quantity:** Nouns introduced by *de* after a number or quantity expression. The quantity must be stated after the verb.  
*Il a trois sœurs. Il en a trois.* (He has three of them.)
3. **Phrases starting with *de*:** Used when referring to a thing or idea.

*Tu parles de la politique? Oui, j'en parle.* (Yes, I talk about it.)

**Stylistic Note on *En*:** Using *en* effectively avoids clunky repetitions like *J'ai des livres, j'ai deux des livres* and is critical for concise discourse.

### Advanced Stylistic Considerations and Common Pitfalls

True stylistic mastery involves knowing when to use standard forms, when to use alternatives, and when to omit articles entirely.

The indefinite pronoun *on* (literally 'one') is one of the most defining features of modern spoken and informal French style. While *nous* (we) is grammatically correct and used in formal writing, *on* is the overwhelming stylistic choice for "we" in everyday conversation.

Pronoun	Stylistic Context	Example
<b>On</b>	Spoken French, informal writing, conveying an indefinite subject, or substituting for <i>nous</i> (we).	<i>On va au cinéma.</i> (We are going to the cinema.)
<b>Nous</b>	Formal writing, official speeches, highly structured or literary prose.	<i>Nous irons au cinéma après le dîner.</i> (We shall go to the cinema after dinner.)

Using *nous* in a casual setting can sound unnecessarily stilted or formal; conversely, using *on* in a highly academic paper would be stylistically inappropriate.

French uses "pleonastic" (redundant-seeming) pronouns to create emphasis or structure. The most common is the *cleft sentence* structure, which focuses attention on a specific element.

***C'est moi qui*** l'ai fait. (It is I who did it.)

***Ce sont les étudiants qui*** manifestent. (It is the students who are protesting.)

The demonstrative pronoun *ce* acts as a crucial stylistic framing element, ensuring the speaker's point of emphasis is clearly communicated. Similarly, the use of *ce* with the verb *être* is mandatory for identification:

*C'est un docteur.* (It is a doctor.) (**Not *Il est un docteur.***)

In a few specific stylistic contexts, articles are deliberately omitted for the sake of brevity or stylistic effect:

1. **Headlines and Signage:** To save space and increase impact.

**NOUVELLE LOI VOTÉE** (New Law Passed)

2. **Proverbs and Fixed Expressions:** In many traditional sayings, the article is dropped. *Tel père, tel fils.* (Like father, like son.)
3. **Apposition:** When a title or profession is placed next to a proper name. *Monsieur Dubois, professeur d'histoire.* (Mr. Dubois, history professor.)
4. **Enumerations:** In simple, rapid-fire lists. *Argent, temps, efforts... tout est perdu.* (Money, time, effort... all is lost.)

The choice between the familiar *tu* and the formal/plural *vous* is entirely a stylistic and social judgment. Using *vous* where *tu* is expected can create unnecessary social distance, while using *tu* inappropriately is a social offense.

## Stylistic Norms:

**Tu** is used for: family, friends, children, pets, and people under roughly the age of 20 (unless in a professional setting).

**Vous** is used for: professional contacts, strangers, people in positions of authority, and when addressing multiple people (regardless of intimacy level).

Mastery of French articles and pronouns moves the learner beyond mere translation to genuine expression. The stylistic norms of French demand that objects and concepts be framed precisely—whether as a general category (definite articles), an indefinite portion (partitive articles), or as concise, grammatically-placed pronouns.

The consistent application of the *de* rule after negation and quantity, the precise ordering of multiple object pronouns (COD before COI, *y* and *en* last), and the deliberate choice between *on* and *nous* are the key stylistic markers. By internalizing these rules, speakers can achieve the conciseness, clarity, and rhythm characteristic of a truly refined French style.

## Conclusion

The correct use of articles and pronouns in French represents one of the most defining markers of linguistic competence and stylistic mastery. Unlike languages where articles function primarily as optional or situational elements, French integrates them deeply into the very structure of meaning, abstraction, and discourse organization.

Mastery of the definite, indefinite, and partitive articles is not limited to semantic precision; it reflects an understanding of how French conceptualizes generalization, categorization, and the relationship between an idea and its linguistic expression. The systematic use of the definite article in expressing general truths, abstract notions, or habitual actions demonstrates a stylistic principle that distinguishes French from English and many other languages.

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