

En / Y — Pronominal Adverbs

Grammar Capsule & Compare-and-Contrast Cheat Sheet — companion to the drill

Part 1 — The Trigger Rule (read this before Level 1)

This drill has three levels — Placement, Negation, Stacking — and all three assume you can already tell what a verb is doing to the noun after it: does it govern **de**, does it govern **à**, and is the noun a thing/place or a person? That underlying preposition-memorization skill is warmed up separately in **Verbes + Prépositions** (a different fact about the same surface verbs — that drill covers verb + preposition + *infinitive*; this one covers verb + preposition + *noun*) and recapped here as reference.

The Core Test — Two Separate Substitutions

en replaces a **de**-phrase: a verb governing *de* before a thing, a partitive article (*du/de la/des*), a quantified noun, or *de* + a place of origin. *parler de qqch* → *en parler* · *boire du café* → *en boire* · *avoir trois frères* → *en avoir trois* · *venir de Paris* → *en venir*

y replaces an **à**-phrase: a verb governing *à* before a thing, or *à/dans/chez* + a place (location). *penser à qqch* → *y penser* · *aller à Paris* → *y aller*

Placement is mechanical once you know which one applies: the pronoun goes immediately before the conjugated verb (or before the auxiliary, in compound tenses) — for reflexive verbs, immediately after the reflexive pronoun and before the verb.

The Trap That Cuts Across Both — Animacy

à/de + a **person** never becomes *en/y*, no matter how closely the sentence otherwise matches the pattern above. This is the single biggest source of errors in this system.

Case	What happens	Example
à + person	Becomes <i>lui/leur</i> (indirect object) — see the Direct vs. Indirect Object Pronouns drill	<i>Il parle à son frère.</i> → <i>Il lui parle.</i>
de + person	Becomes a disjunctive pronoun (<i>de lui/d'elle/d'eux</i>) — NOT <i>en</i>	<i>Je me souviens de mon prof.</i> → <i>Je me souviens de lui.</i>

The double exception: *penser à*, *s'intéresser à*, *tenir à*, *faire attention à*

A small family of à-verbs breaks the rule twice over. With a thing, they take **y** like any other à-verb. But with a **person**, they don't become lui/leur the way à+person normally does — they stay disjunctive (à lui/à elle), the same form used for things-that-are-actually-people-being-excluded-from-en. Same verbs, same preposition, two different exceptions depending on what follows.

	Thing → y	Person → disjunctive (NOT lui/leur, NOT y)
penser à	Elle pense à son avenir. → Elle y pense.	Elle pense à son frère. → Elle pense à lui.
s'intéresser à	Je m'intéresse à ce sujet. → Je m'y intéresse.	Il s'intéresse à cette fille. → Il s'intéresse à elle.
tenir à	Elle tient à cette tradition. → Elle y tient.	Elle tient à son ami. → Elle tient à lui.
faire attention à	Il fait attention à ce détail. → Il y fait attention.	Il fait attention à son frère. → Il fait attention à lui.

Full Reference — en-Triggering Verbs (de + thing), 17 entries

Verb/expression	Meaning	Example
parler de	to talk about (a thing)	Elle en parle.
avoir besoin de	to need (a thing)	J'en ai besoin.
avoir envie de	to feel like (a thing)	Tu en as envie.
avoir peur de	to be afraid of (a thing)	Elle en a peur.
profiter de	to take advantage of (a thing)	Nous en profitons.
se souvenir de	to remember (a thing)	Elle s'en souvient.
s'occuper de	to take care of (a thing)	Il s'en occupe.
se servir de	to use (a thing)	Elle s'en sert.
s'inquiéter de	to worry about (a thing)	Je m'en inquiète.
dépendre de	to depend on (a thing)	Ça en dépend.
douter de	to doubt (a thing)	J'en doute.
rêver de	to dream about (a thing)	Elle en rêve.
être fier/content de	to be proud/happy about (a thing)	Il en est fier.
se plaindre de	to complain about (a thing)	Ils s'en plaignent.
manquer de	to lack (a thing)	Le projet en manque.
boire/manger/acheter/vouloir/prendre/commander/connaître/avoir + du/de la/des	partitive — "some"	J'en bois. / J'en ai trois.
venir de / sortir de / partir de / descendre de	place of origin	J'en viens. / J'en sors.

Full Reference — y-Triggering Verbs (à + thing), 17 entries

Verb/expression	Meaning	Example
penser à	to think about (a thing)	Elle y pense.
réfléchir à	to think over (a thing)	Il y réfléchit.
s'intéresser à	to be interested in (a thing)	Je m'y intéresse.
jouer à	to play (a game/sport)	Nous y jouons.
répondre à	to answer/respond to (a thing)	Elle y répond.
renoncer à	to give up (a thing)	Il y renonce.
réussir à	to succeed at (a thing)	Tu y réussis.
tenir à	to value/care about (a thing)	Elle y tient.
s'habituer à	to get used to (a thing)	Je m'y habitue.
s'attendre à	to expect (a thing)	Nous nous y attendons.
s'opposer à	to oppose (a thing)	Ils s'y opposent.
s'abonner à	to subscribe to (a thing)	Elle s'y abonne.
s'adapter à	to adapt to (a thing)	Il s'y adapte.
participer à	to participate in (a thing)	Nous y participons.
croire à	to believe in (a thing)	Elle y croit.
faire attention à	to pay attention to (a thing)	Il y fait attention.
aller/habiter/être/travailler/rester/ vivre + à/dans/chez	location — "there"	J'y vais. / J'y habite.

Part 3 — Level 1: Placement

Once you know which substitution applies — *en* or *y* — and confirmed the object is a thing/place and not a person, the pronoun goes immediately before the conjugated verb (or before the reflexive pronoun + verb, for pronominal verbs).

Construction	Pronoun lands...	Example
Ordinary verb	right before the conjugated verb	Elle parle de son voyage. → Elle en parle.
Pronominal verb	after the reflexive pronoun, before the verb	Elle se souvient de ce voyage. → Elle s'en souvient.
Quantity expression	the quantity word stays put, right after the verb	J'ai trois frères. → J'en ai trois.

A quantity word (*trois*, *beaucoup*, *plusieurs*, *assez*...) is not part of what *en* replaces — it names how much, and it always stays immediately after the verb once *en* has taken the noun's place.

Part 4 — Level 2: Negation

ne wraps around the entire [reflexive pronoun, if any] + *en/y* + verb (or + auxiliary) block. *pas* lands immediately after the verb/auxiliary — before any past participle.

Construction	ne goes...	pas goes...
Simple tense	right before <i>en/y</i> (or the reflexive pronoun)	right after the conjugated verb
Compound tense	right before <i>en/y</i> (or the reflexive pronoun)	right after the auxiliary, before the participle

Examples: "Il parle de son voyage." → "Il n'en parle pas." · "Il a parlé de son voyage." → "Il n'en a pas parlé." · "Elle s'intéresse à ce sujet." → "Elle ne s'y intéresse pas."

The Non-Agreement Point

In the Direct vs. Indirect Object Pronouns drill's Level 2, a preceding **direct** object pronoun (*le/la/les*) forces the past participle to agree in gender and number. **en never does this** — even when it genuinely fronts a direct object.

Case	Rule	Example
<i>le/la/les</i> precedes an avoir-verb (Direct/Indirect drill)	Participle agrees	Il a acheté les pommes. → Il les a achetées.
<i>en</i> precedes the same kind of avoir-verb	Participle stays invariable — always	Il a acheté des pommes. → Il en a acheté.

This is the whole reason this drill has no Agreement level of its own: there's no rule to drill. Any agreement you do see in a *passé composé* sentence here (*elle s'en est souvenue*, *il n'y est pas allé*) comes from a completely different, unrelated rule — être-auxiliary or essentially-pronominal reflexive verbs agree with the **subject**, regardless of whether *en/y* is anywhere in the sentence.

Part 5 — Level 3: Stacking

When a sentence needs an indirect-object clitic together with *en* or *y*, or *y* together with *en*, French fixes the order — and it never reverses.

Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3
me, te, nous, vous, lui, leur	y	en

The three combinations that actually occur:

Combination	Pattern	Example
IO clitic + <i>en</i>	A thing (→ <i>en</i>) given/sent/shown to a person (→ IO clitic)	Il me donne des conseils. → Il m'en donne.
<i>y</i> + <i>en</i>	The fixed idiomatic order behind "il y en a" — a place holding a quantified/partitive thing	Il y a des pommes dans le panier. → Il y en a.
IO clitic + <i>y</i>	A person taken/met somewhere — narrower, uses <i>me/te/nous/vous</i> (identical whether direct or indirect object)	Il m'emmène à la fête. → Il m'y emmène.

lui/leur + *y* is deliberately not drilled. A genuine indirect-object person *and* a separate place, both pronominalized in the same clause, is vanishingly rare in real French — every candidate sentence came out contrived. The IO+*y* section stays within the natural *me/te/nous/vous* range, which teaches the same ordering rule.

Other Ways to Practice This Beyond the Drill

- Write 10 sentences about things you need, want, remember, or are afraid of, then rewrite each with *en*. Do the same with 10 sentences about places you go, live, or work — with *y*.
- Take five of those sentences and swap the thing for a person instead — force yourself to catch the trap and use a disjunctive pronoun (or *lui/leur*) instead of *en/y*.
- Describe your kitchen, a shop, or a bag out loud using "il y a" for everything in it, then negate every sentence: "il n'y a pas de..." — then answer with *en*: "il y en a" / "il n'y en a pas."
- Pick five gift- or favor-exchange sentences (someone gives/lends/sends someone something) and say them with a stacked IO+*en* pronoun out loud, as one chunk.
- Revisit this drill's missed-item queue specifically — a repeated miss on the animacy trap usually means the person/thing check needs another pass, not the whole *en/y* system.