

Pronoun Ladder

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

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

Direct/Indirect Object Pronouns and En/Y each drill a piece of French's clitic-stacking system in isolation. This is the first place you have to recall the whole order at once, across both pronoun families, in the same round.

The Five Positions

Every object clitic that precedes the verb follows this fixed order. A sentence in this system never fills more than two of these five slots at once — no natural French sentence stacks three.

#	Forms	Function
1	me / te / se / nous / vous	1st/2nd-person object (direct, indirect, or reflexive)
2	le / la / les	3rd-person direct object
3	lui / leur	3rd-person indirect object
4	y	à + thing/place
5	en	de + thing, partitive/quantity, or origin

The Affirmative Imperative: the Block Jumps After the Verb

In a command, the whole pronoun block moves *after* the verb and hyphenates to it and to itself (**Donne-le-lui, Vas-y, Manges-en**). Two real sub-effects come with that move:

- **-s restoration.** The tu-form of -er verbs (and aller) normally drops its -s in a command (*tu donnes* -> *Donne!*). That -s comes back immediately before y or en, for the liaison sound — but only when y/en sits directly against the bare verb with nothing between it (**Vas-y, Manges-en**). Verbs that never dropped an -s to begin with (most -re/-ir verbs, irregulars like *prendre/boire*) are untouched either way.
- **1st/2nd-person reordering.** Position 1 (me/te/nous/vous) normally comes *before* position 2 (le/la/les) everywhere else. In the affirmative imperative it moves *after* le/la/les instead, and me/te become the stressed forms moi/toi (**Donne-le-moi**, not *Donne-me-le*) — eliding back down to m'/t' right before y or en (**Donne-m'en, Va-t'en**). Position 3 (lui/leur) never reorders — it already sits after position 2 in the normal sequence, so le lui stays le lui in both moods.

The Negative Imperative: Everything Reverts

A negative command reverts completely to the normal pre-verb order and forms — te, not toi; no reordering; no -s restoration, since the pronoun is no longer directly after the verb — wrapped in ne...pas (**Ne me le donne pas, N'y va pas, Ne t'en occupe pas**).

A Real Restriction: moi/nous Only

In a true (non-reflexive) affirmative command, the only 1st/2nd-person recipient clitics that occur naturally are **moi** (recipient = the speaker) and **nous** (recipient = the speaker + others). **Toi** and **vous** only ever appear in this slot as *reflexive* pronouns (*Lève-toi*, *Asseyez-vous*) — never as a separate non-reflexive recipient, because a command's addressee can't felicitously be told to benefit non-reflexively "themselves." This is a real narrowing from the declarative Stacking level, which legitimately uses all of *me/te/nous/vous* as IO clitics (*Tu me le donnes* / *Elle te la raconte* — subject and recipient are different people there).

Part 2 — Compare & Contrast Cheat Sheet

Classic Minimal Pairs — Same Sentence, Three Moods

The same underlying command, shown declarative / affirmative-imperative / negative-imperative. This three-way contrast is the actual new thing this topic tests that neither source topic did alone.

Meaning	Declarative	Affirmative Imperative	Negative Imperative
Give it to me	Tu me le donnes.	Donne-le-moi.	Ne me le donne pas.
Send them to us	Vous nous les envoyez.	Envoyez-les-nous.	Ne nous les envoyez pas.
Go there	Tu y vas.	Vas-y.	N'y va pas.
Eat some	Tu en manges.	Manges-en.	N'en mange pas.
Take care of it	Tu t'en occupes.	Occupe-t'en.	Ne t'en occupe pas.

The -s Restoration Rule, Tested

Case	Examples	Why
Restored — y/en sits right against the bare verb	Vas-y. / Manges-en. / Profites-en.	-er verbs (and aller) drop the -s in the bare command, then restore it right before y/en for the liaison.
Not needed — the verb already ends in -s	Bois-en un peu. / Prends-en deux. / Réponds-y.	-re verbs and other irregulars never dropped an -s to begin with, so there's nothing to restore.
Blocked — a pronoun sits between the verb and y/en	Donne-m'en. / Va-t'en. / Envoie-lui-en.	The bare-verb + y/en adjacency the rule requires is broken by the inserted pronoun, so restoration doesn't fire.

moi/nous vs. toi/vous — Recipient or Reflexive

Role	moi / nous	toi / vous
As a stacked recipient (someone else benefits)	Donne-le-moi. (give it to me) / Envoyez-les-nous. (send them to us)	Never — a command can't tell its own addressee to non-reflexively benefit "themselves."

Role	moi / nous	toi / vous
As a reflexive pronoun (the addressee acts on themselves)	Not applicable — a command's addressee is never its own recipient this way.	Lève-toi. (get up) / Asseyez-vous. (sit down) — toi/vous here point back at the addressee, not a separate recipient.

The 8 Pair-Types at a Glance

Every stacking combination Level 1 recombines from Direct/Indirect and En/Y, each shown declarative and — where this system drills a single-command form of it — affirmative imperative.

Pair-Type	Positions	Declarative Example	Affirmative Imperative
PT1	1st/2nd (recipient) + DO	Il me le montre. (he's showing it to me)	Montre-le-moi.
PT2	DO + IO, 3rd + 3rd	Il le lui donne. (he's giving it to him/her)	Donne-le-lui.
PT3	IO (1st/2nd) + en	Il m'en donne. (he gives me some)	Donne-m'en.
PT4	IO (1st/2nd, as DO) + y	Il m'y emmène. (he's taking me there)	— not drilled as a single command in this system
PT5	IO (3rd) + en	Le pharmacien lui en donne. (he gives him/her some)	Envoie-lui-en.
PT6	y + en	Il y en a. (there's some)	Mets-y-en. *
PT7	DO (3rd) + y	Il l'y accompagne. (he takes her there)	Accompagne-l'y.
PT8	DO (3rd) + en	Il l'en persuade. (he persuades her of it)	Persuade-l'en.

* *Il y en a* is impersonal — there's no subject to put in the imperative, so it has no command form of its own. This row's imperative comes from a different verb (*mettre*) instead. Please note: *Mets-y-en/Ajoutes-y-en* are rare/literary register — genuinely correct French, but not something you'd reach for in everyday speech the way *Vas-y* or *Manges-en* come up.