

Y vs. Lui/Leur — Reflex Drill

Grammar Capsule — companion to the drill

Part 1 -- The One Decision This Drill Isolates

Every item in this drill is à + [noun]. There's exactly one question: is the noun a **person** or a **place/thing**?

Case	What happens	Example
à + person (one)	lui (indirect object)	Il téléphone à Julie. -> Il lui téléphone.
à + person (more than one)	leur (indirect object)	Je dis la vérité à mes parents. -> Je leur dis la vérité.
à + place or thing	y	Il va à Paris. -> Il y va.

This is the same rule covered in the En/Y drill's own capsule (the "Animacy" trap) and in Direct vs Indirect Object Pronouns -- this drill isolates just this one collision point and drills it at speed.

Part 2 -- Why This Drill Is Timed

This isn't a knowledge gap. The person/place discrimination is intact and can be stated correctly on demand -- the failure is reflex speed: y fires before the person/place check completes, especially under time pressure. Repeated firing of the wrong reflex under pressure is how a fast, wrong pattern gets reinforced over a slow, correct one.

So this drill skips "explain the rule" checkpoints on purpose -- the point is reps at pace, not re-teaching. Four levels:

- **Level 1 -- Recognition:** tap y or lui/leur, fast, sentence shown intact.
- **Level 2 -- Production:** type the full sentence with the pronoun substituted.
- **Level 3 -- Replace All / Replace Only:** decide whether to sweep every eligible phrase into a pronoun, or replace only the flagged one and leave the rest written out.
- **Level 4 -- Mixed Review:** all three shapes combined. This is also the only level exposed to the site Diagnostic and the only source for this drill's Daily Review items.

The pool is weighted roughly 70/30 toward à+person items, since that's the actual failure direction (y overriding lui/leur) -- à+place is not where the error occurs.

Part 3 -- The Near-Miss Pair

The same verb can take either answer depending on what follows -- that's the actual collision this drill drills:

	Sentence	Answer
Person	Nous répondons au facteur à la porte. -> Nous lui répondons à la porte.	lui
Thing	Elle répond à cette question. -> Elle y répond.	y

Same verb (répondre à), same surface trigger (à), opposite pronoun -- the only thing that changed is what's on the other side of à.

Part 4 -- The Closed Exception This Drill Deliberately Avoids

A small family of à-verbs -- penser à, s'intéresser à, tenir à, faire attention à -- breaks the rule above. With a person, they don't become lui/leur; they stay disjunctive (à lui/à elle) instead.

Verb	Thing -> y	Person -> NOT lui/leur
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.

This drill's à+person pool was checked against the verb+preposition reference before any item was written, specifically to exclude this class -- a lui/leur answer here is always safe. But real French will still throw these four at you outside this drill. (Full detail lives in the En/Y capsule.) You'll notice these four verbs only ever appear on the y side of this drill's own pool, with a thing -- never paired with a person here.

Part 5 -- Level 3/4: Replace All vs. Replace Only

Real spoken French doesn't pronominalize everything in a sentence just because it grammatically could -- this level practices the judgment call.

Replace all sweeps every eligible phrase into a pronoun:

Il donne le livre à Julie. -> Il le lui donne.

Replace only replaces just the flagged phrase and leaves the rest written out:

Il téléphone à Julie. -> Il lui téléphone. (nothing else to replace here -- this drill's own core task is already "replace only" by default, since most items have just the one à-phrase.)

Other Ways to Practice This Beyond the Drill

- Say five à+person / à+place minimal pairs out loud back to back, fast -- force the switch between lui/leur and y in the same breath.
- When reading French, pause on every à-phrase and name it out loud before moving on: "person, lui" or "thing, y."
- Revisit this drill's missed-item queue specifically -- a repeated miss in one direction (almost always y where lui/leur was correct) confirms the reflex-override pattern rather than a knowledge gap.
- Cross-check any à-verb you're unsure about against the En/Y capsule's exception table before assuming it's a regular verb.

Companion reference sheet for the Y vs. Lui/Leur drill.