

## ARTICLE BASICS

The French use articles a whole lot more than we do in English. In general, you must have an article of some sort in front of a noun. If you don't, it will feel naked. Of course, there ARE exceptions to this rule. This IS French, after all! If you are using a possessive adjective (mon, ma, mes, ton, ta, tes, son, sa, ses, notre, nos, votre, vos, leur, leurs) you must NOT use any articles. You must never use the definite article (LE) before a language when the verb is PARLER (to speak; to talk).

Examples:

- ❖ C'est un livre. This is a book.
- ❖ C'est mon livre. This is my book.
- ❖ Je déteste l'espagnol I hate Spanish.
- ❖ Je ne parle pas espagnol. C'est dégoûtant. I do not speak Spanish. It is disgusting.

However, this explanation deals mainly with the basic differences between definite, indefinite and partitive articles. So, ...

### Les articles définis – LE, LA, L', LES

The definite articles, (LE, LA, L', LES) correspond to the English word "the", although it is often omitted in English. It agrees in number and gender with the noun it modifies (the one that comes right after it) and is used with verbs of general likes, dislikes, and preferences. That means that when you are saying, in general, what you like or don't like, what you prefer, what you hate etc. you would use these.

Exemples:

- J'aime la pizza. I like pizza.
- Nous détestons les devoirs. We hate homework.
- Il n'aime pas l'espagnol. He doesn't like Spanish.
- Préférez-vous l'eau minérale gazeuse ou non-gazeuse? Do you prefer fizzy water or plain water?

**NOTEZ BIEN:** Even when the preference verb is negative, the definite article is used.

### Les articles indéfinis – UN, UNE, DES

The indefinite articles UN (m) and UNE (f) correspond to "a", "an", or "one" in English. DES means "some" in English. They are used when not talking about a specific thing, but just "a" thing. These articles are often used after C'est and Ce sont. You should not use an article after être before a person's profession, unless you also have a describing word with it. Note the differences in the following examples comparing indefinite articles to definite articles.

Indefinite	(Non-specific)	Definite	(Specific)
C'est une voiture.	That's a car.	C'est la voiture que j'ai achetée.	That's the car I bought.
Ce sont des petits pois.	Those are peas.	Ce sont les petits pois de mon jardin.	Those are the peas from my garden.
Voilà une place.	There's a spot.	Voilà la place de Mme LaGrosse.	There is Mrs. LaGrosse's spot.
J'ai besoin d'une cassette.	I need a tape.	J'ai besoin de la cassette que j'ai entendue hier.	I need the tape that I heard yesterday.

## Les articles partitifs – DU, DE LA, DE L', DES, DE, D'

The partitive articles DU, DE LA, DE L', DES correspond to the English word “some”. They are used after what we all consuming verbs – verbs that indicate things like eating, drinking, buying, selling, having, owning, wanting, taking, etc. Usually the subject of the sentence is somehow manipulating the noun after the article. Usually. Not always. This IS French.

- J'ai mangé une pizza. I ate a pizza.
- Nous avons acheté des compacts. We bought (some) CD's.
- Je bois du café au lait. I drink café au lait.
- On vend de la viande chez le boucher. They sell meat at the butcher's.

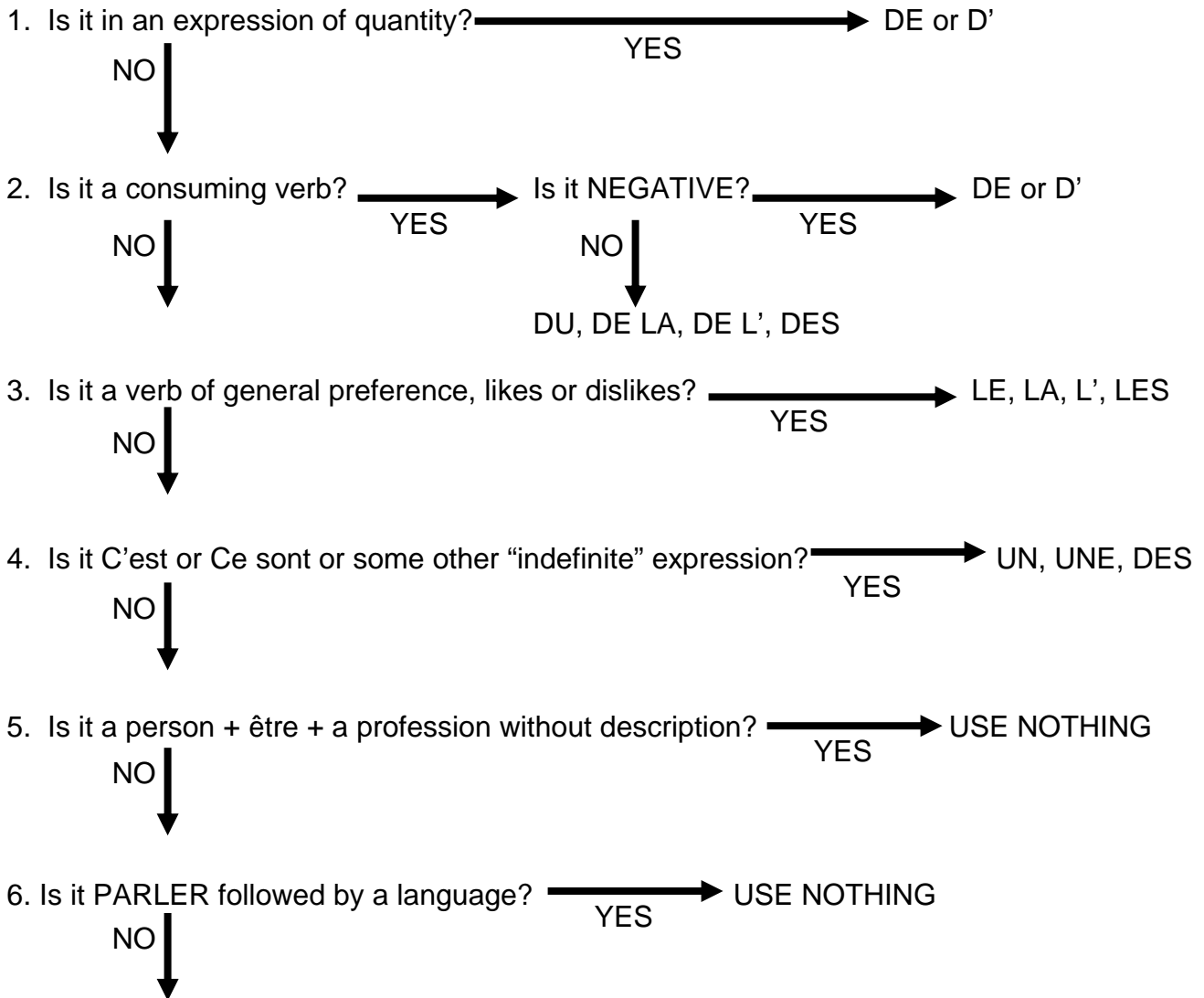
When the consuming verb is negative, the afore-mentioned (that means the ones mentioned before) change to DE or D'. For those of you who care, that means they lose the 'definite article' from them. (DU used to be de + le, but the le drops out; DES used to be de + les but the les drops out) Sometimes we use the word “any” in English. Sometimes we use “no”. Sometimes we don't use anything.

- Je n'ai pas mangé de pizza. I didn't eat (any) pizza.
- Je n'ai pas de bananas. I don't have a banana.  
I don't have (any) bananas.  
I have no bananas.
- Ils ne boivent pas de bière. They don't drink (any) beer.
- Il n'y a pas d'eau chaude. There isn't (any) hot water.

DE and D' are also used after expressions of quantity (specific or non-specific) if there is a noun after the expression. Sometimes we translate this to “of” in English.

- Je fais beaucoup de devoirs. I do a lot of homework.
- Tu as pris trop de spaghetti. You took too much spaghetti.
- Il faut acheter 15 litres de Coca. We must buy 15 liters of soda.
- Vous n'avez pas assez de chaussures. You don't have enough shoes.

When trying to decide what article to use to fill in a blank (whether on a test or just in your head while speaking or writing) you can ask yourself these questions to help you choose the correct article. (I make the assumption that you will know the gender of your nouns.)



**USE CONTEXT CLUES &/OR TRY AGAIN. YOU MAY HAVE MISSED SOMETHING!**