

HOW TO SAY "THERE IS/ARE"

LESSON FOCUS

OBJECTIFS DE LA LEÇON

1. to learn to use the expression **il y a**
 2. to expand vocabulary
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NIVEAU

A1 - [niveau découverte](#) (beginner)

IL Y A

Il y a is a very useful expression in French. It means *there is/there are*.

This expression is formed of: subject pronoun **il** + pronoun **y** + verb **avoir** (to have) in the **third person singular**.

Where in English, this expression uses the verb **to be** and changes from singular to plural according to what follows, in French, we use the verb **avoir** (to have) in the **third person singular**, regardless of what follows:

- **Il y a** une assiette sur la table.
There is a plate on the table.
 - **Il y a** des fourchettes sur la table.
There are some forks on the table.
 - **Il y a** 30 élèves dans la classe.
There are 30 pupils in the classroom.
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IL Y A : PASSÉ ET FUTUR

This expression can also be used in the past or in the future:

- **Il y a eu de** nombreuses manifestations l'année dernière.
There have been many demonstrations last year.

- **Il y aura** du vent demain*.

It will be windy tomorrow.

- **Il y avait** toujours du monde à la fête du village.

There always were a lot of people at the village fête.

*please note how 'il y a' is often used to describe the weather : Il y a du vent (it is windy), il y a du soleil (it is sunny), il y a du brouillard (it is foggy).

IL Y A : NÉGATION

Now, let's put this expression in the negative form, using the same examples we saw earlier:

- Il y a une assiette sur la table. □ Il **n'y a pas** d'assiette sur la table.
There is a plate on the table. □ There is no plate on the table.
- Il y a des fourchettes sur la table. □ Il **n'y a pas** de fourchettes sur la table.
There are some forks on the table. □ There are no forks on the table.
- Il y aura du vent demain. □ Il **n'y aura pas** de vent demain.
It will be windy tomorrow. □ It will not be windy tomorrow.

As you can see, we use **n'** instead of **ne** because **y** is a vowel. **n'** always comes before **y** in this structure. Also, the indefinite article **une/un/des** is replaced with **de**.

IL Y A : "AGO"

Il y a can be used to refer to a period of time in the past. In English, it would be translated by "ago".

- J'ai appris à conduire **il y a** 10 ans.
I learnt to drive 10 years ago.
- Nous avons rencontré Tom dans le parc **il y a** deux heures.
We met Tom in the park two hours ago.
- **Il y a** longtemps que je n'ai pas eu de nouvelles de Sophie.
It has been a long time since I heard from Sophie.