

## **Simple Grammar Lesson Unit, or Grammar without Tears**

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Although the focus of this sample unit is the usage of the relative pronouns *qui* and *que* in French (who, whom, that, which), it is my hope that teachers of foreign languages may find the paradigm useful for teaching most any grammatical concept in any language.

**Methodology:** In teaching a grammar concept, structure the lesson into four parts: the “**Overview**” simply introduces the subject of the lesson; “**Teaching**” offers examples of the grammar structure from which the students can infer the implicit rule that governs it; “**Practice I**” asks students to participate in an oral, choral drill for form-focused practice; and “**Practice II**” provides a meaningful context for communicative practice.

Throughout each part of the lesson, including the “Overview” and “Teaching” sections, have the students repeat after you to habituate them to oral use of the target language. Get your students so used to repeating after you that they do it without being asked. Use the target language throughout the lesson. Model the tasks you want the students to perform rather than explaining them in English. This method is more effective and less time-consuming once students get used to the idea of performing the exercises completely in the target language.

During the practice sections, set rigid parameters and model the practice scenarios with the students at the beginning of each section so that they know exactly what you want them to do.

Finally, teach only one concept in any single lesson to avoid confusion. In the following lesson, for example, I teach the usage of the two relative pronouns in discrete lessons.

### **UNIT LESSON: Relative pronouns *qui* and *que***

**Overview** (one minute): Simply introduce the subject. In this case, I would have the students repeat these questions in the target language, which the new structure will help them to answer.

*Quelle femme?* (Which woman?)  
*Quel homme?* (Which man?)

**Teaching** (three minutes): Before the lesson, write three sentences on the board (or put them on a handout) which illustrate the concept being taught, then ask the students to repeat them after you. Teach only one concept at a time so that the students can focus on a single task. The grammar lesson is not a good time to focus on new vocabulary, verb tenses, etc. If your exercises contain any elements not previously introduced, get students used to the idea that they need not understand every word or verb tense in order to manipulate a grammar concept.

1. *Voilà l'homme. Il travaille toujours.*  
(There is the man. He is always working.)

*Voilà l'homme qui travaille toujours.*  
(There is the man who is always working.)

2. *Voilà la femme. Elle distribue le courrier.*

*Voilà la femme qui distribue le courrier.*  
(There's the woman who delivers the mail.)

3. *Voilà le chien. Il déchire mes vêtements.*

*Voilà le chien qui déchire mes vêtements.*  
(There is the dog that tears up my clothes.)

**Practice I** (two minutes): Use an oral, choral drill to have students practice the structure. Before beginning, model the drill for the students while they repeat after you.

**Model:**

Teacher: Je dis, «Le professeur aime bien ses élèves.»  
(I say: "The teacher likes his students.")

Vous dites, «Voilà le professeur qui aime bien ses élèves.»  
(You say: "There's the teacher who likes his students.")  
STUDENTS REPEAT

Repeat the model a second time, then have the students respond on their own for a final practice. Continue modeling the drill until students know exactly what they're supposed to say.

Teacher: La Fille a perdu son argent.  
(The girl lost her money.)

Students: Voilà la fille qui a perdu son argent.  
(There's the girl who lost her money.)

Teacher: Le garçon se lève à 5h.  
(The boy gets up at 5:00.)

Students: Voilà le garçon qui se lève à 5h.  
(There's the boy who gets up at 5:00.)

Teacher: La femme a marqué trois buts.  
(The woman scored three goals.)

Students: Voilà la femme qui a marqué trois buts.)

Teacher: Le Chat a mangé la souris.  
(The cat ate the mouse)  
Students: Voilà le chat qui a mangé la souris.

Use six to eight sentences in each exercise. Use drills to reinforce usage of the concept after the grammar lesson as well. To vary the exercise, give students an adjective clause such as “who bought the house” and have them use it with different persons.

E.g.,

Teacher: Le Père de Sylvie (Sylvie’s father)  
Student: C’est le père de Sylvie qui a acheté la maison.  
(It’s Sylvie’s father who bought the house.)

You can also use drills to teach or reinforce teaching of verb conjugations, verb tenses, and other elements. For a treatment of the usage and various types of drills, see Wilga Rivers’ Teaching Foreign-Language Skills (U of Chicago P, 1981, pp. 102-105).

**Practice II** (2 minutes): Design an activity for communicative practice in which students can express personal meaning. Through modeling, make sure that students understand the parameters of the exercise. Make all the students stand up in a circle and divide themselves into pairs.

Cue: étudie beaucoup  
(studies a lot)

Have students repeat the cue after you write it on the board (or after you have distributed it on a handout). Then, pick a student to designate as “the pupil who studies a lot” and have the students repeat the following while they point at that pupil

Students: Voilà l’élève qui étudie beaucoup.  
(There’s the student who studies a lot.)

For the second example, have the students repeat the cue,

Cue: est toujours en retard  
(is always late)

then ask the students, «Qui est toujours en retard?», and have them point out someone who is frequently tardy as they say the following.

Students: Voilà l’étudiant qui est toujours en retard.  
(There’s the pupil who’s always late.)

Finally, give the students the following cues in writing, and have them point out the student who best fits each description to their partner.

1. Voilà l’homme. Il travaille toujours.

(There is the man. He is always working.)

Voilà l'homme qui travaille toujours.  
(There is the man who is always working.)

2. Voilà la femme. Elle distribue le courrier.

Voilà la femme qui distribue le courrier.  
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(The boy gets up at 5:00)

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Teacher: La femme a marqué trois buts.  
(The woman scored three goals.)

Cue #1. rigole toujours  
(is always laughing/joking around)

Student #1: Voilà l'élève qui parle bien français.  
(There's the pupil who speaks French well.)

Cue #2. parle bien français  
(speaks French well)

Student #2: Voilà l'élève qui parle bien français.  
(There's the pupil who speaks French well.)

Cue #3: dort en classe  
(sleeps in class)

Student #1: Voilà l'élève qui dort toujours en classe.

Cue #4: aide toujours les autres  
(always helps others)

Student #2: Voilà l'élève qui aide toujours les autres.

Now that students can use and understand the relative pronoun *qui*, I would follow the same "Overview, Teaching, Practice I, and Practice II" format (affectionately referred to as O, T, PI, PII by Dr. Virginia M. Scott's students of foreign language pedagogy at Vanderbilt University) to create another grammar lesson for the relative pronoun *que*.

Teaching only one grammar concept at a time pays off in this case because most students will instinctively gather that the pronoun *qui* functions as the subject of the adjectival clause. Students will learn the usage of *que* in the same way, intuiting that *que* functions as an object of an adjectival clause.

Have the students focus first on employing each pronoun in two distinct lessons (you can even give both lessons during the same class period), then synthesize the lessons in exercises that ask students to combine sentences using the correct pronoun. Some students may insist upon a formal explanation of how one knows when to use which pronoun, but remember that any mention of direct objects or adjectival clauses will frequently meet with utter incomprehension and that such "metalanguage" would require further definition.

Teachers may find it useful to give a separate homework assignment for each element to reinforce the concepts taught before synthesizing the elements in a later lesson.

To monitor and assess student progress, create more scenarios for oral practice, listening exercises, and written homework, quizzes, and test assignments (see Appendix for some written exercises).

## French: Relative pronoun exercise

1. Jeanne a écrit l'aérogamme. Michel a mis l'aérogamme dans la boîte aux lettres.
2. Nous nous servons des timbres. Ils ont acheté les timbres la semaine dernière.
3. Paul et Rémy envoient beaucoup de cartes postales. Leurs cartes postales sont très amusantes.
4. Vous avez vu le facteur. Le facteur distribue le courrier chaque matin.
5. Je vois l'adresse du destinataire. Il a mis l'adresse sur l'enveloppe.
6. L'expéditrice envoie les lettres. Elle a écrit les lettres hier soir.
7. Voilà le code postal. Le code postal indique le département.
8. Voilà le colis. L'employé des postes va mettre le colis sur la balance.
9. On paye le colis selon le poids. Le poids est 5 kilogrammes.
10. Le facteur est d'origine espagnole. Il vous connaît.

French: Relative pronoun exercise

1. Voilà un étudiant. Il rigole toujours.
2. *Voilà une jeune fille. Elle gaspille son temps!*
3. *Voilà un professeur. Il aime bien ses étudiants.*
4. *Voilà un bonbon. Je vais le manger.*
5. *Voilà un livre. Je vais l'acheter.*
6. *Voilà un étudiant. Il est formidable!*
7. *Voilà un jeune homme. Je le vois partout.*
8. *Voilà une voiture. Elle est vraiment sensationnelle!*