



Lesson 3: Please (This Please)

S'il vous plaît

LESSON NOTES

In French, "please" is "s'il vous plaît" and is the formal type of the expression. This form is the most common and can be used in any situation in which you feel you need to express respect, such as asking for directions on the street and with shopkeepers. However, there is also a familiar form, "s'il te plaît," used between people who are personally acquainted such as friends and family members. For traveling, this is less useful as you will need language to speak with people you don't know. It would be good to know "s'il te plaît" in any case, so you won't be confused when you hear it, or so you can say please once you make friends!

In French "please" is "s'il vous plaît". The first word "s'il" is actually the contraction of two words, "si" and "il". "Si" means "if", and "il," in this case, means "it". So all together we have "s'il" which means "if it". It is followed by "vous", which in French is "you" or "to you". So to recap here, we have "s'il vous". Literally this means "If it you". This is followed by "plaît" which means "pleases".

So all together we have "s'il vous plaît". Literally this means "if it pleases you".

The most rudimentary way of using "please" is pointing at something while saying "s'il vous plaît", but let's try and build this up a bit, shall we? Let's start with the expression, "This please." which in French is "ça, s'il vous plaît". In English, "this" comes before please. In French the word order is the same. In French the word for "this", "ça", precedes "s'il vous plaît".

Looking at the word for "this", warrants a look at the word for "that" which, for our purposes, is the same word "ça". The phrase "that please" is the same as "this please", "ça, s'il vous plaît".

PHRASES

French	English
S'il vous plaît	Please (formal "vous" form)
Pardon	Pardon me
Veillez patienter	Please wait
Veillez excuser la gêne occasionnée	Please excuse the momentary disturbance.
S.V.P., respectez la silence	Please keep quiet.

QUICK TIP

As we have seen, we can use "s'il vous plaît" as a polite way to ask for someone's attention like "excuse me" in English. It can also be a direct way to tell someone you want to get by, also like "excuse me." This is useful in crowded areas such as the metro. Teachers use "s'il vous plaît" to get their classroom to quiet down. Police officers also use it to control crowds. If someone is in your way, you can say "s'il vous plaît" and they will know to move. Another word for "excuse me" that is less forceful but equally polite is "pardon" which is obviously close to the English "pardon me". "Pardon" is generally the better term for when you want to get by as it is less forceful, but the French are not shy about using "s'il vous plaît" to make their point. Thus, "s'il vous plaît" is a term that you may not say as much as you will have said to you.

QUICK TIP 2

"S'il vous plaît" and "s'il te plaît" are not as commonly used as the English "please". For instance in English, announcements and signs would employ "please" where in French they would use "veuillez": the imperative tense of the verb "vouloir" (to want). For example, "veuillez patienter" translates as "please wait" and literally means "want to wait". "Veuillez" is always followed by a verb in infinitive form (verbs with the "er" ending) as in the above example and in the following: "Veuillez excuser la gêne occasionnée" ("Please excuse the momentary disturbance" a phrase you will hear a lot in France.) If "s'il vous plaît" is used on signs, it is often written like this "S.V.P." as in "S.V.P., respectez la silence." ("Please keep quiet" or literally "please respect the silence".) Again, these are not terms you need to use yourself, but you will hear and read them often.