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The impersonal pronoun **il** ('it') is used in French when an action has no agent, that is, when there is no person or animate being responsible for the action. The conjugated verb is always in the third person singular, no matter what tense the impersonal verb takes.


 Tex: Tiens, **il** pleut très fort! Tex: Wow, it is raining really hard!




The action of the verb (**pleut**, 'is raining') is an impersonal, natural force. The impersonal pronoun **il** is often referred to as a 'dummy subject' because it fills the syntactic position of subject but doesn't have any real meaning.

weather expressions

Weather expressions in both French and English require impersonal subjects. The infinitive of 'weather verbs' can only be conjugated in the third person singular form (the **il** form).


	pleuvoir, to rain	Il pleut.	It's raining.
	neiger, to snow	Il neige.	It's snowing.
	grêler, to sleet	Il grêle.	It's sleeting.
	geler, to freeze	Il gèle.	It's freezing.
	bruiner, to drizzle	Il bruine.	It's drizzling.

Weather conditions are also expressed in French using the verb **faire** followed by an adjective or noun. Of course, when the verb faire is used impersonally in such weather expressions, it can only be conjugated in the third person singular form (**il fait**). See [faire expressions](#) for a more complete list of weather expressions.

	Il fait chaud.	It's hot.
	Il fait du vent.	It's windy.
	Il fait beau.	It's beautiful.

falloir (il faut ...) 'to be necessary'

The verb **falloir** only exists in the impersonal form (**il faut**). It always expresses the notion of necessity or obligation which is translated into English in various ways ('must,' 'should,' 'have to'). **Falloir** may be followed by an infinitive as in (d), by a noun as in (c), or by a subordinate clause introduced by **que** as in (a); note that the verb in the subordinate clause in (a) requires the [subjunctive mood](#). Finally, it may be preceded by a pronoun acting as an indirect object as in (b), a way to [avoid the subjunctive](#).


	Comme la majorité des Français, Tex ne voit pas l'intérêt du scandale Lewinsky.		Like the majority of the French, Tex does not see the point of the Lewinsky scandal.
	Tammy (scandalisée):		Tammy (shocked):
	(a) Il faut que nous sachions la vérité.	[faut que + clause]	It is necessary that we know the truth. We should/must know the truth.

(b) Il nous faut des preuves.	[indirect object + faut]	We need evidence.
(c) Il faut une enquête.	[faut + noun]	An investigation is necessary.
Tex: Mais tu sais bien ce qui s'est passé!		Tex: But you know what happened!
(d) Il faut te calmer.	[faut + infinitive]	It is necessary that you calm down. You have to calm down.

impersonal expressions with 'être' + [adjective]

The impersonal subject **il** may appear with the verb **être** followed by an adjective and an infinitive. Note that the infinitive is always introduced by the preposition **de** in such impersonal expressions:

Il est + [adjective] + de + [infinitive]

 Tex: **Il est amusant de** lire les journaux américains!

Tex: It's fun to read American newspapers!

Tammy: **Il est difficile de** comprendre ton humour.

Tammy: It is difficult to understand your sense of humor.



IL EST AMUSANT DE LIRE DES JOURNAUX AMÉRICAINS !

other common impersonal expressions


Il y a, there is, there are

il est + clock time (**Il est deux heures**, It's two o'clock.)

Il s'agit de, to be about, to be a matter of, to be a question of

Il vaut mieux, to be better, to be advisable

Listen to the dialogue:

 Tammy: **Il est** 18 h. Regardons le journal télévisé. **Il y a** un reportage sur l'infidélité.

Tammy: It's 6 o'clock. Let's watch the news. There's a report on infidelity.

Tex: Ah non, ça alors. **Il s'agit** seulement **de** tourmenter les présidents et les tatous! **Il vaut mieux** changer de chaîne!

Tex: Oh, no, not that. It's only about tormenting presidents and armadillos! It's better to change the channel!



exercices

fill in the blanks

Complete with one of the following impersonal expressions: 'il fait', 'il neige', 'il pleut', 'il gèle', 'il est', 'il faut', 'il y a'.

- Tammy : En été, au Texas, _____ très chaud.
- Tex : Oh! _____ du vent. Mon béret s'est envolé!
- Tammy : J'aime quand _____ à Noël. J'adore les Noëls blancs.
- Edouard : Les escargots et les canards aiment l'eau. Ils aiment quand _____.
- Tammy : Quand _____ au Colorado, je vais skier.
- Tammy : Quand _____, on fait du patin à glace sur le lac.

7. Bette : Tu as l'heure? Oh, non, _____ déjà 8 heures!
8. Joe-Bob : _____ visiter l'Alamo une fois dans sa vie!
9. Tammy : A UT, _____ environ 50 000 étudiants.
10. Tex : Oh, c'est tard, _____ rentrer. Tammy ne va pas être contente.
11. Tammy : Regarde, _____ jour, le soleil se lève!
12. Tammy : _____ difficile de comprendre Tex.