

Article or Preposition (1/2) : *de* or *des*?

*Il y avait **des** livres partout. Beaucoup **de** livres semblaient anciens.*

There were books everywhere. A lot **of** books seemed old.

LESSON

What is it?

The plural indefinite article *des* has different usages in French and when combined with the preposition *de*, it changes form as well.

What is it like in English?

In English, *des* is often omitted, whereas it is compulsory in French:

*Nous avons **des** amis en France.* → We have Ø friends in France.

What is it like in French?

Des refers to quantities which are unspecified (= we don't know how many there are).

*J'ai attendu **des** heures.* → I waited for hours.

1. *des* → *de* or *d'*

- When the adjective is placed before the noun, *des* becomes *de* (or *d'* with a vowel). This is the case for adjectives such as: *petit, joli, grand, bon, beau*, etc. which are usually positioned before nouns.

*Vous avez **des** enfants. Vous avez **de** beaux / **d'**adorables enfants.*

→ You have children. You have beautiful/delightful children.

- When a sentence is in the negative form (*ne... pas, ne... plus, ne... jamais*, etc.) *des* becomes *de*:

*Nous voulons **des** réponses. Ils n'ont **pas de** réponses à nous donner.*

→ We want answers. They don't have any answers to give us.

Watch out! When opposing a negative statement with a positive one, *des* remains *des*.

*Nous ne voulons **pas des** mots mais **des** actions.*

→ We don't want words but actions.

2. *de + des* → *de* or *d'*

When preceded by the preposition *de*, *des* becomes contracted in *de* (or *d'* with a vowel) in the following instances:

- Expressions of quantities: *beaucoup de, un kilo de, assez de, peu de, trop de*, etc.

*Il y a **des** voitures sur la place. Il y a beaucoup **de** voitures.*

→ There are cars on the square. There are many cars.

*Je voudrais un kilo **d'**amandes.*

→ I would like 2 pounds of almonds.

Watch out! The expression *bien* meaning "many" is always followed by *des*:

*J'ai perdu **bien des** heures à travailler sur ce projet.*

→ I have wasted many an hour working on this project.

- Verbs and expressions followed by the preposition *de*: *parler de, vivre de, rire de, dépendre de, accuser de, trembler de, répondre de, gémir de, rêver de, rougir de, avoir besoin de, s'occuper de*, etc.

- Il y a **des** problèmes urgents. Elle a parlé **de** problèmes urgents.*
 → There are urgent issues. She talked about urgent issues.
- La Police doit me donner **des** réponses. J'ai besoin **de** réponses.*
 → The Police need to give me answers. I need answers.

3. des → des

- If the noun is specified, the definite article (*de + les = des*) will be used.
*Beaucoup **des** chats qui sont dans le parc sont nourris par une vieille dame.*
 → Many of **the** cats in the park are fed by an old lady.
*Je voudrais un kilo **des** amandes en promotion.*
 → I would like a kilo of **the** almonds on sale.
*Elle a parlé **des** problèmes de ce pays.*
 → She spoke about **the** issues of this country.
- The restrictive expression *ne... que* is following by *des* in the plural.
*Je ne veux que **des** roses et pas **de** fuschias.*
 → I only want roses and no fuschias.
- Quantifiers such as *la plupart de*, *la moitié de*, *la majorité/minorité de* and percentages are followed by *des* in the plural:
*La plupart **des** étudiants travaillent bien.*
 → Most students are doing well.
*50 % **des** jeunes parlent anglais.*
 → 50% of young people speak English.

EXERCISES

1 Underline the correct answer in the following sentences.

- Je rêve [de / d' / des] abricots bien mûrs.
- Il a ramassé un kilo [de / d' / des] fraises.
- 500 grammes [de / d' / des] pêches de Provence, s'il vous plaît.
- Nous avons rencontré beaucoup [de / d' / des] amis pendant les vacances.
- Le parti des Verts n'a pas obtenu assez [de / d' / des] voix pour gagner.
- Avec ce nouveau régime, vous déjeunez [de / d' / des] fruits uniquement.
- Dans cet appartement, il y a [de / d' / des] grandes pièces.
- Vous avez [de / d' / des] lits confortables ?
- Les enfants ont rêvé [de / d' / des] poissons qu'ils avaient pêchés.
- Je n'achète jamais [de / d' / des] produits congelés, mais [de / d' / des] produits frais.
- Il s'occupe [de / d' / des] enfants, c'est sa profession.

2 Translate the following sentences into French.

- a. Very few people like working during their holidays.
→
- b. Most schools are buying laptops for their pupils.
→
- c. I don't want sprouts but fries!
→
- d. We don't have any more tickets left.
→
- e. One kilo of grapes, please!
→
- f. 10% of students failed their exam.
→
- g. They talked about the representations of animals in ancient Egypt.
→
- h. You need proofs to convince the judge.
→
- i. We see great opportunities for your business.
→
- j. It depends on the circumstances.
→

3 Free Writing:

- a. Make a list of general items using *j'ai besoin de, j'aime parler de*, etc.
Example: J'ai besoin d'encouragements...
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.....
.....
- b. Using the same prompts make a more specific list.
Example: J'ai besoin des encouragements de mes parents...
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