Invariable demonstrative pronouns (*les pronoms démonstratifs invariables*)

I. The demonstrative pronoun *ce* (c’ before e)

When *ce* is used as a demonstrative pronoun, it is invariant. It can mean *this, that, these, it*, and, when it precedes a noun indicating a person or persons, *he, she* or *they*.

As a pronoun, *ce* is always used with a form of the verb *être* (which either precedes or follows *ce* immediately) and generally refers to something previously mentioned.

*Ce + être* is followed by

1. a determiner (an article or possessive adjective) + noun (which can be modified by an adjective)

Sentences consisting of *ce + être + determiner + noun* normally refer to a previous statement or situation, but *ce* can also refer to a following sentence part introduced by *de + infinitive* (last example).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>C'est un miracle!</em></td>
<td>It's a miracle!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C'est une bonne idée.</em></td>
<td>That's a good idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ce n'est pas du bon français.</em></td>
<td>That is not good French.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ce n'est pas la peine.</em></td>
<td>It's not worth the trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C'est la même chose.</em></td>
<td>That's the same thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Expression</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ce sont mes neveux.</td>
<td>They are my nephews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qu'est-ce que c'est? - C'est un papillon.</td>
<td>What is that? - That's a butterfly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'était un plaisir de vous connaître.</td>
<td>It was a pleasure to meet you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. a proper noun

C'est David. That (he) is David.
C'est Monsieur Duval. That (he) is Mister Duval.

3. a pronoun

Qui est-ce? Est-ce toi, Pierre? - Oui, c'est moi. Who is this? Is this you, Peter? - Yes, it's me!
Ce sont* eux. It's them.
Ce n'est pas ton manteau, c'est le mien. This is not your coat, it's mine.
C'est celui-là que je veux. That's all.

* Note that c'est is used before singular pronouns (moi, toi, lui, elle), and before nous and vous. Ce sont is used before eux and elles. This rule is however not always followed in spoken French, which generally uses c'est in all cases.
4. a superlative

*C'est le meilleur film de tous les temps.*
This is the best movie of all times.

5. a masculine singular adjective or an adverb to refer to a previously mentioned idea, situation or event

*C'est triste!*
That's sad!

*C'est bien / genial / chouette / formidable!*
That's great!

*C'est super!*
That's super!

*C'est pareil.*
That's the same.

*C'est entendu!*
It's agreed!

*C'est drôle! (fam. = marrant / rigolo)*
That's funny!

*Ce n'est pas grave.*
Don't worry about it. It's no big deal.

*C'est vrai.*
That's true.

*C'est faux.*
That's false.
C'est loin d'ici?
   Is that far from here?

Ce n'est pas juste.
   That's unfair.

C'est sûr.
   That's for sure.

C'est (très) gentil de votre part. [or: C'est (très) gentil à vous.]
   That's (very) nice of you.

Notes:
- Ce followed by être + masculine singular adjective or adverb
can also announce a specific noun or clause.

   C’est joli, ce paysage.
   This landscape is pretty.

   C’est intéressant, ce que vous dites.
   What you are saying is interesting.

- After ce + être, the adjective is always in the masculine singular
  form, no matter what ce refers to.

   Cette région en hiver, c'est très beau! (NOT belle)
   This region in the winter, it's very beautiful!

- When ce + être + adjective is followed by an infinitive, the
  preposition à usually precedes the infinitive.

   Quel âge a-t-elle? C'est difficile à dire.
   How old is she? That's difficult to say.
More uses of *ce*

1. *Ce* + *être* + noun, pronoun or adverb + *qui* or *que* are often used for emphasis.

   *C'est ta fille qui me l'a dit.*
   It's your daughter who told me.

   *C'est moi qui paie.*
   I am (the one who is) paying. (It's on me!)

   *C'est nous qui sommes responsables.*
   We are (the ones who are) responsible.

   *Ce sont eux qui ont raison.*
   They are (the ones who are) right.

   *J'aime les chiens. Ce sont les chats que je déteste.*
   I like dogs. It's cats that I hate.

   *C'est demain que je le verrai.*
   I will see him tomorrow.

   *C'est là que j'habitais quand j'étais jeune.*
   That's where I lived when I was young.

2. *Ce* is used in the constructions *c'est* + noun or *c'est* + *que* + clause to specify and/or explain what has been stated at the beginning of the sentence.

   *Mon violon d'Ingres, c'est la peinture.*
   My hobby is painting. ("violon d'Ingres" is an idiom)

   *Le problème, c'est que je n'ai pas le temps.*
   The problem is that I don't have the time.
3. *Ce* + *être* is used before dates, weekdays or adverbs of time.

*Quel jour est-ce aujourd'hui?*
What day is it today?

*C'est (aujourd'hui) mardi.*
Today is Tuesday.

*C'est demain le deux juin.*
Tomorrow is the second of June.

*C'est maintenant ou jamais.*
It's now or never.

*C'est quand ton anniversaire?*
When is your birthday?

*C'était hier mon anniversaire.*
Yesterday was my birthday.

4. *C'est* is used in the equation of two infinitives or of two nouns.

*Vouloir, c'est pouvoir.*
Where there's a will, there's a way.

*Le temps, c'est de l'argent.*
Time is money.

5. The demonstrative pronoun is also part of the relative pronouns (*ce qui, ce que, ce dont, ce à quoi*) meaning *what*.

*Ce qui est arrivé est regrettable.*
What happened is regrettable.
Faites ce que vous voulez.
Do what you want.

6. Ce is used in the construction c'est + noun (or c'est + de + infinitive) to summarize a previous clause beginning with ce qui, ce que, ce dont, etc.

Ce que tout le monde craint, c'est une guerre nucléaire.
What everyone is afraid of, that is a nuclear war.

Ce que je propose, c'est de continuer.
What I suggest is to continue.

7. Ce + être + à + noun or pronoun (+ de + infinitive) is used for emphasis and to express whose turn it is.

C'est à vous de décider.
It's up to you to decide.

C'est à lui de jouer.
It's his turn to play.

C'est à Pierre (de parler).
It's Peter's turn (to speak)

C'est a vous (toi).
It's your turn.

Sayings and expressions

C'est de l'hébreu pour moi.
That's Greek (lit.: Hebrew) to me.

C'est trop beau pour être vrai.
It's too good to be true.
C'est à prendre ou à laisser.
   Take it or leave it.

C'est simple comme bonjour!
   It's easy as pie!

C'est une autre paire de manches.
   That's a horse of another color (i.e., completely different)

C'est la cerise sur le gâteau.
   That's the icing on the cake.

C'est la goutte d'eau qui fait déborder le vase.
   It's the straw that breaks the camel's back.

C'est incroyable mais vrai.
   That is incredible but true.

C'est bonnet blanc et blanc bonnet.
   It's six of one and half a dozen of the other.

C'est kif-kif.
   It comes up to the same!

C'est une tempête dans un verre d'eau.
   It's a tempest in a teapot.

C'est le calme avant la tempête.
   It's the calm before the storm.

C'était pour rire.
   It was meant jokingly.

Un point, c'est tout!
   Period!
C'est à deux pas d'ici.
    It's very close by.

C'est d'accord.
    It's agreed.

C'est une façon de parler.
    It's a figure of speech.

C'est (c'étaient) le coup de foudre.
    It is (was) love at first sight.

Trop c'est trop!
    Enough is enough!

C'est promis.
    It's a promise.

C'est sans danger.
    It's safe.

C'est dommage!
    That's a shame!

C'est-à-dire
    That is to say

Ce sera long.
    It will take a long time.

**C'est vs il (elle) est and ce sont vs ils (elles) sont**

In French, 'he is' can be expressed by *il est* or *c'est*; 'she is' can be expressed by *elle est* or *c'est*; 'it is' can be expressed by *il est*, *elle est* or *c'est*; 'they are' can be expressed by *ils sont*, *elles sont*.
or ce sont. But these constructions are not interchangeable. Here is how they differ in usage.

A. *Il est, elle est* are used to express *he is, she is, it is*; *ils sont, elles sont* are used to express *they are*

1. before an adjective (referring to a specific person or thing)

   *C'est ton appareil-photo? Il est beau!*
   Is this your camera? It is beautiful!

   *Voilà sa mère. Elle est française.*
   Here is her mother. She is French.

   *Comment trouves-tu ces biscuits? Ils sont bons!*
   How do you like these cookies? They are good!

2. before a preposition ( + determiner + noun)

   *Le sel? Il est sur la table.*
   The salt? It is on the table.

   *Elle est chez sa mère.*
   She is at her mother's house.

   *Où sont mes clés? Elles sont dans ton sac à main.*
   Where are my keys? They are in your handbag.

3. before an adverb

   *Les moustiques? Ils sont partout.*
   The mosquitoes? They are everywhere.
4. before an unmodified noun without an article (referring to a profession, nationality or religion)

*Elle est infirmière.*
She is a nurse.

*Ils sont catholiques.*
They are Catholics.

*Il est canadien.*
He is a Canadian.

*Elles sont musulmanes.*
They are Muslims.

**But:**
When the noun indicating profession, nationality or religion is modified by an adjective, *ce + être + indefinite article* is used.

*C'est une infirmière extraordinaire.*
She is an extraordinary nurse.

*C'est un Canadien bilingue.*
He is a bilingual Canadian.

*Ce sont des catholiques fervents.*
They are fervent Catholics.

B. *C'est* is used to express *he is, she is, it is; ce sont* is used to express *they are*

1. before a proper noun

*C'est François.*
This (he) is François.
C'est Madame Duval.
This (she) is Madame Duval.

2. before a determiner + noun or + noun modified by an adjective

C'est le professeur.
He is the teacher.

C'est la femme de Tom.
She is Tom's wife.

C'est un ami.
He is a friend.

C'est ma tante.
She is my aunt.

Est-ce ton frère?
Is he your brother?

Ce sont des Italiens.
They are Italians.

Ce sont mes parents.
They are my parents.

C'est une bonne étudiante.
She is a good student.

C'est un excellent médecin.
He is an excellent doctor.

C'est ma meilleure amie.
She is my best friend.
Ce sont de très bons avocats.
    They are very good lawyers.

3. before a pronoun

Ce sont eux.
    They are the ones.

C'était elle.
    It was her. (She was the one.)

Ce n'est pas lui.
    It's not him.

C'est celui que tu connais.
    He is the one you know.
C'est vs Il est/Elle est

source: LanguageGuide.org

Both *ce* and *il/elle* can represent the definite (things that have gender — this includes both persons and nonpersons).

*Il/elle* are used generally when the noun is *not* modified by an article.

*Il est pompier.* He is a fireman.
*Elle est médecin.* She is a doctor.

When the noun is modified use *ce*.

*C'est un pompier.*
He/She is a fireman.

“*Ce n'était pas un* romancier d'un immense talent parmi les romanciers du dix-neuvième siècle, c'était *le* romancier même du dix-neuvième siècle.”
He was not a novelist of immense talent among the novelists of the 19th century, he was *the* novelist of the 19th century.
-- *Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly à propos d'Honoré de Balzac*

*Ce* should be used before proper nouns and before pronouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C'est Jacques Chirac à la porte.</th>
<th>It's Jacques Chirac at the door</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C'est moi</td>
<td>It is me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'est toi</td>
<td>It is you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'est la nôtre</td>
<td>It is ours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Either c'est or il/elle est can be used before adjectives.

When c'est is used, the phrase takes on a wider meaning. The pronoun ce represents the entire class of an object, while the pronoun il/elle normally represents an object in particular.

- *Ils nous ont servi du reblochon.*
  - They served us reblochon cheese.

- *C’est très fort.*
  - In general this cheese is very strong.

- *Il est très fort.*
  - This particular serving of cheese was very strong.

(but wouldn’t it be clearer to say “Il était très fort” ?)