

NEGATION AND NEGATIVE WORDS

There is not, of course, a direct connection between the length of a word and the problems that it can cause when you are learning a language. 'No' and 'not' are good examples of this.

'*There were **no** people in the room*' and '*There were **not** / **weren't** any people in the room*' mean the same thing. You might then think that 'no' and 'any' mean the same thing. This is definitely *not* true.

English also has a complication in which a double negative in strict or 'correct' grammar makes an idea positive. This may seem more like maths than language, and is not always the way people speak, but it is best to observe the rule. You don't want to make any **no** mistakes.

NEGATION

'NOT'

'Not' is used to make a negative idea after the verb 'be' and auxiliary verbs:

*I'm **not** tired.*

*They **don't** like it.*

*She **hasn't** phoned.*

*You **shouldn't** do that.*

'Not' is used to give a negative idea to following adjectives, nouns and phrases:

*He told me he's **not** interested.*

*I said I wanted tea, **not** coffee.*

*I told you **not** to do that.*

'Not' is frequent in short responses and expressions:

*Are you ready? **Not** yet.*

*Did he find somewhere to stay? **Not** that I know of.*

'NO'

'No' is a basic negation:

*Did you enjoy the evening? **No**.*

'No' is used on signs to indicate prohibition:

No smoking

'No' is used before countable and uncountable nouns to mean 'not a' or 'not any':

No politician can be trusted.

*There were **no** people about at that time of night.*

*There's **no** sugar in the cupboard.*

COMMON WORDS WITH A NEGATIVE MEANING

'No' is the prefix for a number of common negative words:

Nobody / **No one** / **No-one** likes to be called stupid. (not one person)

*This is an island like **nowhere** in the world.* (not one place)

*There's **nothing** more that I can say.* (not one thing)

*I wanted to buy some bread, but there was **none** left.* (not any)

*We were going to meet at 8.00 but **none** of the others turned up.* (not one)

The 'o' in 'nobody' and 'nowhere' is pronounced like the 'o' in 'go'. The 'o' in 'nothing' and 'none' is pronounced like the 'u' in 'up'.

'Neither' 'nor' means 'not one and not the other':

Neither the table nor the desk will fit in that space.

OTHER NEGATIVE WORDS

Negative ideas can be expressed by prefixes and suffixes (*uninteresting, disrespect, carelessly* etc.) They may be expressed by conjunctions, prepositions and adverbs (*unless, without, never...*), or by verbs (*lack, miss...*)

'Lack' is both a noun and a verb:

There was a lack of enthusiasm for the plan.

He's a nice guy, but he lacks charisma.

'Miss' is a verb, used like this:

A piece of the puzzle is missing.

NOT like this:

~~*The puzzle misses a piece.*~~

POINTS TO REMEMBER AND ERRORS TO AVOID

It is an error to omit the auxiliary 'do' in negative simple past structures.

Right: *We didn't / did not have enough time.*

Wrong: ~~*We had not enough time.*~~

The word 'not' comes at the beginning of an infinitive structure.

Right: *We've decided not to go abroad this year.*

Wrong: *We've decided to not go abroad this year.*

Notice how 'not' combines with 'everybody' etc.

Right: *Not everybody has got a smartphone.*

Wrong: ~~*Everybody has not got a smartphone.*~~

Words such as 'hardly', 'scarcely', 'barely' already have a negative meaning, and are used with variations of 'any', not with variations of 'no'.

Hardly anybody objected to what she said.

(Compare with: *Almost nobody objected ...*)

Exercise 1

Decide whether each sentence below is completed by 'no' or by 'not'.

1. We need to concentrate on the future, the past.
2. When the waiter finally brought our meal, the food was even hot.
3. In the past, tourists would be seen in this part of town.
4. There is denying that the new bridge is an impressive achievement.
5. Demanding customers are longer satisfied with mediocre products.
6. Winning at any price is what matters most in life.
7. The city's bike-sharing scheme will provide transport at virtually cost to users.

8. Until the last minute, there was certainty that the contract would be signed.
9. Alcoholic beverages cannot be served to anyone above the legal drinking age.
10. There is single way to lead a successful marketing campaign.

Exercise 2

What is the correct completion for each sentence?

1. I have reason to doubt my information.
 - a) no
 - b) not
 - c) any
2. There's the slightest chance that you'll get what you want.
 - a) no
 - b) not
 - c) neither
3. There's I'd rather do than stay here, but I have to go now.
 - a) nothing
 - b) anything
 - c) something
4. Who took all the cookies? There are left!
 - a) any
 - b) none
 - c) nothing
5. I'll be happy if I have to go to another meeting.
 - a) not
 - b) ever
 - c) never
6. You check the receipts yet, did you?
 - a) won't
 - b) can't
 - c) didn't
7. Hardly attended the last training session of the day.
 - a) nobody
 - b) anybody
 - c) somebody
8. Ms Olsen is not ready to do that job. is she keen to start.
 - a) Not
 - b) Either
 - c) Nor

9. It seems that no-one was in favour of the alternative proposal.

- a) quite
- b) almost
- c) hardly

10. We abandoned the project as of the solutions we tried could be made to work.

- a) none
- b) no-one
- c) any