

English Ladder

Student Workbook

Concept #25: Negatives

A polished self-study handout designed for print or tablet use. Read the concept, notice the pattern, and then complete the matching practice set on your own.



Grammar Concepts #25

Understanding Negatives in English

Visual anchor

Use the concept poster to spotlight the main language pattern in **Concept #25: Negatives** and keep the explanation visible during practice and discussion.

ENGLISH LADDER

Concept #25 ► **Negatives**

Keep your negatives near the beginning of sentences.

- ▼ I always don't eat hamburgers.
I never eat hamburgers.
(Change the positive adverb to a negative.)
- ▼ Most teachers are not frequently late.
Few teachers are frequently late.
(Change the positive adjective to a negative.)
- ▼ Everyone in the class did not fail the exam.
Nobody in the class failed the exam.
(Change the positive pronoun to a negative.)

Sometimes you can simply remove two negatives.

- ▼ Every student is not unhappy.
Every student is happy.
- ▼ I don't infrequently visit Tom.
I frequently visit Tom.

Be sure not to use double negatives.

- I won't tell the secret to nobody. ▼
I won't tell the secret to anybody.

Note the difference between the two types of phrases below.

Do you like sushi? Can you ski?	• (I have no evidence that you do or don't like sushi.) • (I have no guess about whether or not you can ski.)
Don't you like sushi? Can't you ski?	• (I would be surprised if you don't like sushi.) • (I would be surprised if you cannot ski.)

NOVO NOO NOVQ NOC NONG

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Core Idea

In English grammar, the placement and use of negatives are crucial for clear and correct communication. This guide will provide a rigorous explanation of negative constructions, including numerous examples to illustrate these concepts. Additionally, we will delve into the importance of placing negatives early in a sentence for clarity and effectiveness.

Quick reference

1. Grammar in the Image	Incorrect: I always don't eat hamburgers.
1. Grammar in the Image	Incorrect: Every student is not unhappy.
1. Grammar in the Image	Incorrect: I won't tell the secret to nobody.
1. Grammar in the Image	Do you like sushi? Can you ski? Meaning: I have no evidence or guess about whether you like sushi or can ski.
2. Placing the Negative Early in an English Sentence	Clarity: Early placement of negatives helps immediately establish the sentence's negative context, reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding.
2. Placing the Negative Early in an English Sentence	Example 1: Sub-standard: Everyone does not like spinach. Superior: Not everyone likes spinach. Explanation: The phrase Everyone does not like spinach can be confusing because it might imply that no one likes spinach. The revised version Not everyone likes spinach makes it clear that some people do like spinach, but not all. By placing Not everyone at the beginning, the sentence immediately clarifies that the statement applies to only part of the group.

Understanding Negatives in English

1. Grammar in the Image

The image provides various guidelines for using negatives effectively in English sentences. Here's a detailed explanation of these guidelines:

Keep your negatives near the beginning of sentences:

- Incorrect: I always don't eat hamburgers.



- Correct: I never eat hamburgers. Explanation: The positive adverb always is changed to the negative adverb never. Placing the negative element early in the sentence simplifies the structure and makes the meaning clear right away.
- Incorrect: Most teachers are not frequently late.
- Correct: Few teachers are frequently late. Explanation: Instead of using not frequently, which can be ambiguous, use few, a negative quantifier. This places the negative idea at the forefront, making the sentence clearer.
- Incorrect: Everyone in the class did not fail the exam.
- Correct: Nobody in the class failed the exam. Explanation: The phrase everyone did not can be confusing as it might suggest no one failed. Using nobody places the negative term at the beginning and removes any ambiguity.

Sometimes you can simply remove two negatives:

- Incorrect: Every student is not unhappy.
- Correct: Every student is happy. Explanation: Double negatives like not unhappy can cause confusion. Replacing them with a single positive term happy simplifies the sentence and makes it more direct.
- Incorrect: I don't infrequently visit Tom.
- Correct: I frequently visit Tom. Explanation: Double negatives like don't infrequently are cumbersome. Replacing them with the positive term frequently makes the sentence clearer and easier to understand.

Be sure not to use double negatives:

- Incorrect: I won't tell the secret to nobody.
- Correct: I won't tell the secret to anybody. Explanation: Double negatives like won't... nobody can create confusion. Using anybody instead of nobody eliminates the double negative and clarifies the meaning.

Note the difference between the two types of phrases:

- Do you like sushi? Can you ski? Meaning: I have no evidence or guess about whether you like sushi or can ski.
- Don't you like sushi? Can't you ski? Meaning: I would be surprised if you don't like sushi or if you cannot ski.

2. Placing the Negative Early in an English Sentence

Placing negatives early in a sentence ensures that the intended meaning is clear from the start. This method prevents ambiguity and makes the sentence easier to understand. Here's why placing the negative early in a sentence is important, followed by detailed examples.

Why Place Negatives Early:

- Clarity: Early placement of negatives helps immediately establish the sentence's negative context, reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding.



- Conciseness: Sentences become shorter and more direct when the negative is placed at the beginning.
- Focus: Early negatives help readers or listeners quickly grasp the essential negative aspect of the sentence.

Examples and Explanations:

- Example 1: Sub-standard: Everyone does not like spinach. Superior: Not everyone likes spinach. Explanation: The phrase Everyone does not like spinach can be confusing because it might imply that no one likes spinach. The revised version Not everyone likes spinach makes it clear that some people do like spinach, but not all. By placing Not everyone at the beginning, the sentence immediately clarifies that the statement applies to only part of the group.
- Example 2: Sub-standard: All the students did not pass the test. Superior: Not all the students passed the test. Explanation: The phrase All the students did not pass the test could be interpreted as meaning no students passed. The revised version Not all the students passed the test clarifies that some students did pass, but not everyone. This avoids the ambiguity present in the sub-standard version.
- Example 3: Sub-standard: Everyone doesn't agree with the decision. Superior: Not everyone agrees with the decision. Explanation: The phrase Everyone doesn't agree with the decision suggests that no one agrees at all. The revised version Not everyone agrees with the decision clarifies that some people agree, but not all, making the intended meaning clear from the outset.

Additional Examples:

- Sub-standard: Everything is not lost. Superior: Not everything is lost. Explanation: The revised version Not everything is lost clarifies that while some things may be lost, not everything is. The placement of Not everything at the beginning removes potential confusion.
- Sub-standard: All employees did not attend the meeting. Superior: Not all employees attended the meeting. Explanation: The revised version Not all employees attended the meeting clarifies that some employees did attend the meeting, but not all. This early placement of the negative Not all helps in understanding the intended meaning.
- Sub-standard: Everybody doesn't like coffee. Superior: Not everybody likes coffee. Explanation: The revised version Not everybody likes coffee clarifies that some people do like coffee, but not everyone, making the statement more precise and clear.
- Sub-standard: All the lights did not turn on. Superior: Not all the lights turned on. Explanation: The revised version Not all the lights turned on clarifies that some lights did turn on, but not all. This makes the meaning clear from the beginning.
- Sub-standard: Everyone doesn't need to bring a lunch. Superior: Not everyone needs to bring a lunch. Explanation: The revised version Not everyone needs to bring a lunch clarifies that some people do need to bring a lunch, but not everyone. This avoids potential misunderstanding.
- Sub-standard: All the guests did not arrive on time. Superior: Not all the guests arrived on time. Explanation: The revised version Not all the guests arrived on time clarifies that some guests did arrive on time, but not all, providing immediate clarity.



- Sub-standard: Everything was not checked. Superior: Not everything was checked. Explanation: The revised version Not everything was checked clarifies that some things were checked, but not everything, avoiding ambiguity.

By keeping your negatives near the beginning of sentences, simplifying double negatives, and avoiding double negatives altogether, you will create clearer and more grammatically correct sentences.

Understanding these concepts will significantly improve your English communication skills.



Practice Check

Answer the quiz questions below with responses consistent with the grammar concepts taught in this post.

ITEM 01

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Everyone does not like spinach.
- b) Not everyone likes spinach.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 02

Select the correct sentence.

- a) All employees did not attend the meeting.
- b) Not all employees attended the meeting.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 03

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Everyone doesn't agree with the decision.
- b) Not everyone agrees with the decision.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 04

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Everything is not lost.
- b) Not everything is lost.

Correct choice: _____

**ITEM 05**

Select the correct sentence.

- a) All the lights did not turn on.
 - b) Not all the lights turned on.
-

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 06

Select the correct sentence.

- a) She does not always agree with him.
 - b) She rarely agrees with him.
-

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 07

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Most teachers are not frequently late.
 - b) Few teachers are frequently late.
-

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 08

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Everyone in the class did not fail the exam.
 - b) Nobody in the class failed the exam.
-

Correct choice: _____

**ITEM 09**

Select the correct sentence.

- a) I don't infrequently visit Tom.
 - b) I frequently visit Tom.
-

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 10

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Every student is not unhappy.
 - b) Every student is happy.
-

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 11

Select the correct sentence.

- a) She isn't unfriendly.
 - b) She is friendly.
-

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 12

Select the correct sentence.

- a) They don't never go out.
 - b) They always go out.
-

Correct choice: _____

**ITEM 13**

Select the correct sentence.

- a) He doesn't dislike her.
- b) He likes her.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 14

Select the correct sentence.

- a) I won't tell the secret to nobody.
- b) I won't tell the secret to anybody.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 15

Select the correct sentence.

- a) She can't find nothing.
- b) She can't find anything.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 16

Select the correct sentence.

- a) They don't need no help.
- b) They don't need any help.

Correct choice: _____

**ITEM 17**

Select the correct sentence.

- a) He hasn't got no money.
- b) He hasn't got any money.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 18

Select the correct sentence.

- a) We didn't do nothing wrong.
- b) We didn't do anything wrong.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 19

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Everything was not checked.
- b) Not everything was checked.

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 20

Select the correct sentence.

- a) All the guests did not arrive on time.
- b) Not all the guests arrived on time.

Correct choice: _____

**ITEM 21**

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Do you like sushi?
- b) Don't you like sushi?

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 22

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Are you coming to the party?
- b) Aren't you coming to the party?

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 23

Select the correct sentence.

- a) Do you know him?
- b) Don't you know him?

Correct choice: _____

ITEM 24

Select the correct sentence.

- a) I always don't eat hamburgers.
- b) I never eat hamburgers.

Correct choice: _____



Self-check Answer Key

Use the key after you have completed every item on your own.

ITEM 01

b) Not everyone likes spinach.

ITEM 02

b) Not all employees attended the meeting.

ITEM 03

b) Not everyone agrees with the decision.

ITEM 04

b) Not everything is lost.

ITEM 05

b) Not all the lights turned on.

ITEM 06

b) She rarely agrees with him.

ITEM 07

a) Most teachers are not frequently late.

ITEM 08

a) Everyone in the class did not fail the exam.

ITEM 09

a) I don't infrequently visit Tom.

ITEM 10

a) Every student is not unhappy.

ITEM 11

a) She isn't unfriendly.

ITEM 12

a) They don't never go out.

ITEM 13

a) He doesn't dislike her.

ITEM 14

b) I won't tell the secret to anybody.



ITEM 15

b) She can't find anything.

ITEM 16

b) They don't need any help.

ITEM 17

b) He hasn't got any money.

ITEM 18

b) We didn't do anything wrong.

ITEM 19

b) Not everything was checked.

ITEM 20

b) Not all the guests arrived on time.

ITEM 21

a) Do you like sushi?

ITEM 22

a) Are you coming to the party?

ITEM 23

a) Do you know him?

ITEM 24

b) I never eat hamburgers.