

Unit 40 - Negating

1 Negating nouns, phrases

1.1 *Pas* is most commonly used where there is no verb :

- Il n'y a plus de riz - **Pas** de problème
- *We've run out of rice* - *No problem*
- Marie est de retour ? - **Pas** encore
- *Is Marie back ?* - *Not yet*
- Pierre adore les anchois. **Pas** moi !
- *Pierre adores anchovies. I don't !*

1.2 When negating a whole preceding sentence, *non* is used :

- Tu as pris l'appareil-photo ? - **Non**
- *Did you bring the camera ?* - *No (I didn't)*

1.3 Both *non* and *pas* are used where a negative contrasts with a positive. Here *non pas* can also be used to create emphasis :

La bière anglaise se boit fraîche mais **non / pas** glacée
English beer is drunk cool but not chilled
Elle est Écossaise, **non pas** Anglaise!
She's Scottish, not English!

1.4 The negative of *aussi* is *non plus* :

- Je n'aime pas la chimie - Moi **non plus**
- *I don't like chemistry - I don't either*

1.5 The construction *not only ... but also* is translated by *non seulement ... mais aussi*. Note that, unlike in English, there is no inversion of subject and verb after *non seulement* :

Non seulement **il a plu**, mais il a aussi fait du vent
*Not only **did it** rain, but it was also windy*

2 Negating verbs

Verbs can be made negative by using the negative particle *ne* plus a negative adverb such as *pas*. The most common negative constructions are :

<u>Group A</u>	<u>Group B</u>
ne ... pas	ne ... personne
ne ... jamais	ne ... ni ... ni
ne ... rien	ne ... aucun
ne ... plus	ne ... nulle part
ne ... guère	ne ... que

In formal language *pas* is sometimes omitted after *savoir*, *pouvoir*, *cesser de* and *oser de* when these take an infinitive :

Elle ne pouvait cacher son irritation
She couldn't hide her annoyance
Il n'ose lui dire la vérité
He daren't tell him / her the truth

3 Position of negative adverbs

3.1 Affirmative sentences

- 3.1.1 In simple tenses (like the present where there is no auxiliary verb) and with the imperative, the position of the adverb is the same for all the above constructions - the *ne* directly precedes the verb and the adverb directly follows it :

Je **n'ai pas** d'argent
I have no money
 Ne gaspille **pas** d'argent
Don't waste money

- 3.1.2 In compound tenses (like the perfect where there is an auxiliary verb), the position of the adverb is as follows. For Group A above the *ne* directly precedes the **auxiliary** and the adverb directly follows it :

Je **n'ai rien** vu - *I've seen nothing*

For Group B above the *ne* directly precedes the **auxiliary** and the adverb directly follows the **past participle** :

Je **n'ai vu personne** - *I've seen no one*

3.2 Interrogative sentences

The word order for questions formed by inversion is the same as for affirmative sentences, except that the subject pronoun comes immediately after its verb or auxiliary :

N'as-tu **pas** d'argent ? Pierre **n'a-t-il pas** d'argent ?
Don't you have any money ? Doesn't Pierre have any money ?
 N'as-tu **rien** vu ? Pierre **n'a-t-il rien** vu ?
Didn't you see anything ? Didn't Pierre see anything ?
 N'as-tu vu **personne** ? Pierre **n'a-t-il vu personne** ?
Didn't you see anybody ? Didn't Pierre see anybody ?

3.3 Infinitives

- 3.3.1 For both present and past infinitives, the position of the adverb is as follows. For Group A above the *ne* and the adverb directly precede the infinitive :

Il prétend **ne rien** voir
He claims he can't see anything
 J'espère **ne jamais** le rencontrer
I hope I never meet him
 J'aurais préféré **ne pas** l'avoir vu
I would have preferred not to have seen him
 J'aurais préféré **ne jamais** l'avoir vu
I would have preferred never to have seen him

(In the case of past infinitives the rule is in fact more flexible, but is best learned as stated.)

- 3.3.2 For Group B above the *ne* directly precedes the infinitive and the adverb directly follows it :

J'espère **ne voir personne**
I hope I won't see anyone

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Il vaut mieux ne dire **aucun** mensonge
It is best to not to tell lies
J'aurais préféré n'avoir vu **personne**
I would have preferred to have seen no one

3.4 Position of object pronouns

3.4.1 When object pronouns are used in a negative sentence they come immediately after the *ne* :

Je ne **l'**ai pas vu
I haven't seen him / it
Je ne **le lui** aurais jamais donné
I would never have given it to him / her

3.4.2 The above rule applies for a negative used in an interrogative sentence, when verb or auxiliary and subject pronoun are inverted :

Je **ne le** connais pas \Rightarrow **Ne le** connais-tu pas ?
I don't know him \Rightarrow Don't you know him ?
Je **ne l'**ai pas vu \Rightarrow **Ne l'**as-tu pas vu ?
I didn't see him / it \Rightarrow Didn't you see him / it ?

4 Negative adverbs as subject of sentence

It is very easy forget to use the *ne* when the negative adverb is the subject of a sentence :

Personne **ne** me l'a dit
No one told me (that)
Aucun des candidats **n'**a été accepté
None of the candidates was accepted

5 Articles after negatives

Remember that after a negative the indefinite and partitive articles in French are generally replaced by *de* :

J'ai **une** voiture - Je n'ai pas **de** voiture
I have a car \Rightarrow I don't have a car
Elle a **du** chocolat - Elle n'a pas **de** chocolat
She has some chocolate \Rightarrow She doesn't have any chocolate

This, however, does not apply to *ne ... que* as it is not negative in meaning.

6 *Ne ... que*

Ne ... que is a very common alternative to *seulement* for expressing the idea of *only*. Here the *que* is placed before the noun to which the sense of the word *only* refers. This is unlike English which uses context and / or vocal stress to make the sense clear. For example, in the sentence *I only clean the kitchen on Tuesdays* the "only" refers to the idea of "on Tuesdays", that is the subject does not clean the kitchen on any other day. Hence :

Je **ne** nettoie la cuisine **que** le mardi

In the sentence *On Tuesdays I only clean the kitchen* the "only" refers to the idea of "the kitchen", that is the subject does not clean anything other than the kitchen on Tuesdays. Hence :

Je **ne** nettoie **que** la cuisine le mardi

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This construction can also be used to refer to the subject of a sentence, but in this case it must be introduced by *il y a*. For example, in the sentence *Only I clean the kitchen on Tuesdays*, the "only" refers to the subject pronoun "I". It is translated :

Il n'y a que moi qui nettoie la cuisine le mardi

Note that *ne ... que* cannot be applied directly to the action of a verb. Instead it must be applied indirectly using the construction *ne faire que*. For example in the sentence *On Tuesdays I only tidy the kitchen, I don't clean it* the "only" refers to the verb "tidy". Hence the first clause of this sentence is translated :

Le mardi je **ne fais que** ranger la cuisine

Other examples include :

Ses actions **ne feront qu'**aggraver la situation

His actions will only make the situation worse

Je **ne fais que** regarder, merci

I'm only browsing, thank you

7 The expletive *ne*

Sometimes *ne* is used in French without having the force of a negative, and this is called the "expletive" *ne*. It is used in careful speech or writing in the following circumstances :

- 7.1** With the conjunctions *avant que*, *à moins que*, *de crainte que*, *de peur que* :

Je serai parti avant que tu **ne** reviennes

I will have left before you come back

- 7.2** With the verb constructions *craindre que*, *avoir peur que*, *redouter que*, *éviter que*, *empêcher que* :

Je crains qu'il **ne** soit trop tard pour l'empêcher

I fear it is too late to stop him

- 7.3** Optionally, in comparative phrases involving *plus que* or *moins que* plus a verb :

Il est moins grand que je **ne** le pensais

He is smaller than I thought