

56. Negative constructions

1 General

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

Group A		Group B	
ne ... pas	<i>not</i>	ne ... personne	<i>no-one</i>
ne ... jamais	<i>never</i>	ne ... ni ... ni	<i>neither ... nor</i>
ne ... rien	<i>nothing</i>	ne ... aucun	<i>none</i>
ne ... plus	<i>no more</i>	ne ... nulle part	<i>nowhere</i>
ne ... guère	<i>scarcely</i>	ne ... que	<i>only</i>

2 Word order

2.1 Affirmative sentences

In 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* comes directly before the verb and the adverb comes directly after it:

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

In tenses like the perfect where there is an auxiliary verb, the position of the adverb is as follows. For Group A above the *ne* comes directly before the **auxiliary** and the adverb comes directly after it:

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

For Group B above the *ne* comes directly before the **auxiliary** and the adverb comes directly after the **past participle**:

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

2.2 Questions

The word order for questions formed by inversion is similar, except that the subject stays with its verb:

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?

2.3 Infinitives

With infinitives the negative adverb comes before the infinitive for Group A constructions:

Il prétend **ne rien** voir
He claims he can't see anything
J'espère **ne jamais** le rencontrer
I hope I never meet him

And after the infinitive for Group B constructions:

J'espère ne voir **personne**

I hope I won't see anyone

Il vaut mieux ne dire **aucun** mensonge

It is best to not to tell lies

2.4 Object pronouns

Object pronouns like *le*, *la* and *lui* come immediately after the *ne*:

Je **ne le** connais pas **Ne le** connais-tu pas?

I don't know him Don't you know him?

Je **ne l'ai** pas vu **Ne l'as-tu** pas vu?

I didn't see him Didn't you see him?

3 Negative adverbs as subject of sentence

Don't forget to use the *ne* when the negative adverb begins the sentence / clause:

Personne **ne** me l'a dit

No one told me

Aucun des candidats **n'a** été accepté

None of the candidates was accepted