Negation in Declarative Sentences

Expressed by:

- by placing not after an auxiliary or a modal verb
- by placing not before a particular element of the sentence
- by the negative determiner (no), pronouns, e.g. nobody, nothing, and by negative and semi-negative adverbs (never, rarely, barely, etc.)
- by the negative conjunctions: neither, nor, neither...nor

The proof that a sentence is negative is:

- it can take a positive tag
  
  They do not trust him, do they?

- it can be expanded by a co-ordinate clause introduced by neither, nor
  
  They do not trust him, nor do we.

**Negation by placing not after an auxiliary or modal verb**

- when the predicator contains an auxiliary or a modal verb, negation is expressed by not after them
- unless not emphasized, it is normally used in its contracted form n’t, which is attached to the auxiliary or to the modal verb: isn’t
- synonymous contracted forms:
  
  She isn’t present. vs. She’s not present.
- the negative form of the verb have – if the verb have denotes possession, it is followed by not on condition that the nominal phrase realizing the following object contains premodifiers such as determiner pronouns (my, your, his...) or cardinal numerals (two, three...)
  
  I haven’t your address.
  
  He hasn’t two sisters but three.
- when the predicator does not contain an auxiliary or a modal verb, negation is formed by using the auxiliary do+ the bare present infinitive:
  
  I don’t fancy that style.
- until the 17th century negation in all the regular verbs was formed by means of not without the auxiliaries
  
  I know thee not, old man.

**Negation by placing not before a particular element of sentence structure**

By placing not before a particular element of sentence structure, a special negative stress is given to that element – in the majority of cases this type of negation makes the whole simple sentence negative, which can be proved by adding a positive tag:
Not a word has been said, has it?

- no instead of not is used before the comparatives: no more, no less, no sooner, no longer:
  *He is no more a millionaire than you are.*
- in some cases, not affects only the following element and the whole sentence is positive – a negative tag can be added:
  *You met her not long ago, did you?*
- not is used to negate infinitival, participial and gerundial clauses as well as some finite subordinate clauses – if the main clause is positive, the whole complex sentence is regarded as positive and can take a negative tag:
  *The boy learned not to express his emotions, didn’t he?*

**Negation by the negative determiner, pronouns and by negative and semi-negative adverbs**

When a negative determiner, pronoun or adverb (no, nobody, none, nothing, neither, never, nowhere) or a semi-negative adverb (hardly, rarely, seldom) is used, the predicator is in the affirmative form:

*Nobody knows you here.*

*None are so blind as those who won’t see.*

Since there can be only one negative word in an English simple sentence, no and its compounds must be replaced by any and its compounds when the predicator is negated:

*no- any*
* nobody – anybody*
*no-one – anyone*
*nothing – anything*

*He knows nothing of life in big cities. – He doesn’t know anything of life in big cities.*

Some items occur almost exclusively in negative, interrogative and conditional sentences:

*He is tolerant to some extent. – He is not tolerant at all.*

**Negation by the negative conjunctions: neither, nor, neither...nor**

*He couldn’t hear neither could he speak.*

*Neither duty nor honour means anything to a drunkard.*

**Emphasis and Toning Down of Negation:**

A negative item may be made emphatic by means of whatever or at all:

*He has no worries whatsoever.*

*He hasn’t been there at all.*
Toning down with the use of introductory clauses which contain verbs believe, reckon, seem, suppose, think etc. in the negative form.
I don’t believe he can manage it.
He doesn’t seem to be inclined to work.

**Negative Prefixes and Suffixes**

Negative derivational morphemes (prefixes and suffixes) denote the negative idea with nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs: anti, dis, in, mis, non, uns and the suffix less:

decision – indecision
careful – careless

The occurrence of a negative derivational morpheme does not produce sentence negation. Two proofs: 1. it cannot take an affirmative tag and 2. it cannot be expanded by a co-ordinate clause introduced by nor (neither):
Ther was indecision in his look, wasn’t there.
There was indecision in his look and there was in hers too.

There may also be another negative placed before the negative compound or the verb preceding the negative compound may be negated:
It’s no inconvenience for me to give you a lift home.

The statement with two negatives does not have exactly the same meaning as the affirmative statement. Thus the sentence I do not disagree with you is not the same as I agree with you.

**Double Negation**

Double negation in English is typical of substandard (uneducated) English:
I don’t find it no trouble.

However, there may be two or more negative items in a complex sentence, one in each clause:
I didn’t say I didn’t believe you but your story certainly sounds strange.

Two negative items may also occur in a complex nominal phrases with a postmodifier expressed by a non-finite or finite clause:
There is no danger of not arriving at the airport in time.

In Slovene double negation is a common grammatical feature – a significant difference with English language.
I don’t know anybody in this village. vs. Nikogar ne poznam v tej vasi.