

Avoiding Double Negatives

A **double negative** is a construction in which two or more negative words are used where one is sufficient.

NONSTANDARD: Herbert **never** has **no** time to relax **no** more.

STANDARD: Herbert **never** has *any* time to relax any more.

OR

Herbert has **no** time to relax any more.

The contraction "**n't**" is a shortened way of saying **not**. Do not use the contraction "**n't**" with another negative word.

NONSTANDARD: There **isn't no** tread on those tires.

STANDARD: There **isn't** *any* tread on those tires.

Other negative words that a writer should not pair up with additional negative words include: **no, not, nothing, barely, scarcely, and hardly**.

NONSTANDARD: They **scarcely** had **no** tickets left for the concert.

STANDARD: They **scarcely** had *any* tickets left for the concert.

Now you try it. Rewrite each of the sentences below correcting it so there are no double negatives. Remember that there is often more than one way to correct each error.

1. I couldn't barely hear my baby brother crying for his bottle.

2. Giorgio didn't have no papers on his desk during the exam.

3. I heard her say that she didn't do nothing wrong.

4. Doris doesn't have no more time to practice her trumpet.

5. We hadn't scarcely enough orange juice for the family at breakfast.

6. I looked for clues concerning his disappearances but didn't find nothing for several weeks.

7. "I don't want no more trouble," the frustrated shopkeeper exclaimed at the meeting.

8. I haven't never seen no marsupials, even on television.

9. My grandmother Sanchez hasn't never left her beautiful homeland of Puerto Rico.

10. Soon-Yi doesn't have no easy answers to that complicated problem.

11. We don't need no education.

12. I can't get no satisfaction.

13. They can't hardly run the required distance.

14. Harry doesn't have no reason to complain.

15. The seagulls do not ever resist the waste receptacles at the beach.

16. Our choir members can't scarcely hear the director's cue.

17. It really does not make no difference to them.

18. When we looked for disposable razors on the shelf in the drugstore, we found that there wasn't none.

19. Unfortunately, the search party hasn't found none of the missing airplane parts.

20. My mother couldn't locate none of the other web sites.
