When we want to say that something is not true or is not the case, we can use negative words, phrases or clauses. Negation can happen in a number of ways, most commonly, when we use a negative word such as *no* and *not:*

- Is there a bus at ten o'clock?   No. The last one goes at nine forty-five. (*No* = There isn't a bus at ten o'clock.)
- Kieran does**n't** play the piano. (It is not true that Kieran plays the piano.)

The most common negative words are *no* and *not*.

Other negative words include: *neither, never, no one, nobody, none, nor, nothing, nowhere*:

- There were no newspapers left in the shop by one o'clock.
- Most children don't walk to school any more.
- Neither my sister or I have ever eaten a rabbit.
- She's never been abroad.
- No one was there when I got home.
- Nobody came to the house for several days.
- None of my cousins live near us.
- I do not have a Facebook account, nor a Twitter account.
- Nothing was found at the campsite.
- The ball was nowhere.

Neither

Neither allows us to make a negative statement about two people or things at the same time. Neither goes before singular countable nouns. We use it to say 'not either' in relation to two things.

- Neither parent came to meet the teacher. (The mother didn't come and the father didn't come.)
- Neither dress fitted her. (There were two dresses and not one of them fitted her.)

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Never

To state that a thing has not happened; at no time has a thing happened. A replacement for the phrase "not ever".
- o I have never seen the Grand Canyon.
- o He never went to school.

None

None is the pronoun form of *no*. *None* means 'not one' or 'not any'. We use it as a pronoun to replace countable and uncountable nouns.

- o My mother had two apples. My father had none.
- o There was none to share.

Do not use none when you are referring to no one or nobody:

- o Happily, no one was injured. Not: Happily, none were injured.

No one, nobody, nothing, nowhere

No one, nobody, nothing and nowhere are indefinite pronouns.

We use no one, nobody, nothing and nowhere to refer to an absence of people, things or places. We use them with a singular verb:

- o Nobody ever goes to see her. She's very lonely.
- o You usually have to wait for a long time. Nothing happens quickly.
- o There was nowhere to park the car.

We often use the plural pronoun they to refer back to (singular) no one or nobody when we do not know if the person is male or female:

- o No one remembers the titles of the books they've read.

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No one or nobody?

No one and nobody mean the same. Nobody is a little less formal than no one. We use no one more than nobody in writing:

- o I knew nobody at the party.
- o No one moved; no one said anything.

We write no one as two separate words or with a hyphen: no one or no-one but not noone.

Nobody or not … anybody, etc.

Nobody, no one, nothing, nowhere are stronger and more definite than not … anybody/anyone/anything/anywhere:

- o I did nothing. (stronger than I didn't do anything.)
- o She told no one. (stronger than, She didn't tell anyone.)

We don't use not + anyone/anything/anywhere as the subject of a clause:

o Nothing will make me change my mind. Not: Not anything will make me change my mind.

We don't use nobody, no one, nothing, nowhere after no, not, never or other words which have a negative meaning (hardly, seldom). We use anyone, anybody, anything, anywhere:

- o I can't do anything. Not: I can't do nothing.
- o She talks to hardly anyone. Not: She talks to hardly no one.

There is another way to make a negative meaning without using any of these words. Can you name a few?

We can also make negative meanings using prefixes (*de-*, *dis-*, *un-*): and suffixes (-*less*):

- o The land was devalued by the trash dump nearby. (deaccelerate, deactivate, debone, debug, decaffeinate, decentralize, decode, decrease, deduct, defog, deform, decapitate, decompose, detour, deconstruct, dehydrate, degrade, deforestation, deodorant)

- o He was very disrespectful to the teacher. (disable, disagree, disallow, disobedience, disapprove, disconnect, discourage, disfavor, disguise, disharmony, disinterest, dislike, disorder, disqualify, disrepair, dissatisfied, distrust)

- o He was an unlikeable person. (unable, unacceptable, unadvisable, unaffected, unaffordable, unaided, unamusing, unarmed, unattractive, unavailable, unbalanced, unbutton, uncaring, uncertain, uncompleted, unconfident, uncomfortable, unconstitutional, uncontrollable, undefeated, undefined, undeserved, undisciplined, undiscovered, undress, unearned, unemployed, unequal, unfair, unfamiliar, unfinished, unforgivable, unguided, unharmed, unhealthy, unhurt, unidentified, unimagined, unimportant, uninspired, uninstall, uninsured, unjustified, unkept, unknowing, unlucky, unmarked, unmeasurable, unmovable, unofficial, unopened, unorganized, unpack, unpersuaded, unproductive, unprofitable, unproven, unreachable, unreasonable, unrecognizable, unreligious, unrepeated, unresolved, unreturnable, unseen, unselfish, unskilled, unstack, unstoppable, unsuccessful, unsurprising, untangle, untraditional, untrained, untranslatable, untreated, unusable, unusual, unused, unwashed, unwritten,

We can also make negative meanings using the suffix (-*less*):

- o This new printer is useless; it's always breaking down. (ageless, boneless, careless, carless, clueless, cordless, countless, endless, friendless, helpless, lawless, mindless, priceless, selfless, shapeless, skinless, sleepless, sugarless, tireless, weightless)

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Few, Hardly, Little, Rarely, Scarcely, Seldom

We can also use the following words to make negative or negative-like statements: few, hardly, little, rarely, scarcely, seldom:

- o There's only a few left.
- o I can hardly wait until the show begins.
- o I had little information that would help me.
- o There are rarely ducks in this pond.
- o Scarcely a day goes by without Emma coming over to the house.
- o I scarcely have a choice in the matter.
- o We seldom hear any noise at night.

Negative clauses with any, anybody, anyone, anything, anywhere.

We don't use *not* with *some*, *someone*, *somebody*, *something*, *somewhere* in statements. We use *any*, *anyone*, *anybody*, *anything*, *anywhere*:

- o There aren't any seats left. You'll have to stand. (Not: There aren't some seats left.)
- o Tell them I don't want to see anyone. (Not: Tell them I don't want to see someone.)

After verbs with a negative meaning like decline or refuse, we use anything rather than something:

- o They refused to tell us anything about it. (preferred to They refused to tell us something about it.)

Negation: emphasizing

When we want to emphasize something negative, we often use *at all*. We normally use *at all* immediately after the word or phrase we are emphasising:

- o *There's **nothing at all** left in the fridge.*
- o *I'd rather **not** be here **at all**.*
- o *We had **no** rain **at all** this summer and now we have floods!*

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- *Not at all* can come before an adjective:
- *She was **not at all** happy with the result.*

We can also use *whatsoever* for emphasis after *no + noun, nobody, no one, none* and *nothing*. Its meaning is similar to *at all*, but it is stronger. We can use *whatsoever* to add emphasis to any negative noun phrase:

No food or drink **whatsoever** must be brought into the classroom.

A:
Did any of her family go to the wedding?
B:
*No. **None whatsoever**.*

We can also use *not a bit, a little bit, one bit, in the least, the least bit* to emphasize negatives:

- *Setting off the alarm was supposed to be a joke but **no one** found it **one bit** funny.*
- *We suggested going to the cinema but they did**n't** seem **the least bit** interested, so we just took them shopping instead.*

We often add emphasis to negation to make what we say more polite. When someone makes a request using the phrase *Do you mind if* or *Would you mind if*, instead of replying with *No* (I don't mind) we often say *not at all* or *not in the least* when we reply:

A:
Do you mind if I sit here?
B:
Not at all.

A:
Would you mind if I check my emails on your computer?
B:
Not in the least.

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When someone says *thanks* or *thank you*, we often reply *not at all*:

A:
Thanks so much for lunch, Rachel.
B:
Not at all. *It was my pleasure*.

Negation of *think, believe, suppose, hope*

When we use verbs like *think, believe, suppose* (mental process verbs) to express uncertainty about something, we usually use *not* with the mental process verb rather than with the verb in the following clause:

- *I **don't think** I'm going to pass my exams.* (preferred to *I think I'm not going to pass my exams*.)

However, we don't normally use a negative with *hope* and *wish*:

- *I **hope** I'm **not** going to fail.* Not: I don't hope I'm going to fail.
- *I **wish** I had**n't** sent that email to Joan.* Not: I don't wish I had sent …