

# Negative Constructions in French

## I. Introduction

When we talk about negative constructions or negative sentences, we mean sentences which include 'don't', 'never', 'no one', 'nowhere' etc. in their construction.

An example of a negative sentence in English would be: I **don't** want to go out today.

In French 'don't' is translated to 'ne...pas'. The French translation of the sentence above would be: Je **ne** veux **pas** sortir aujourd'hui.

## II. Formation

The order of the negative in the sentence isn't exactly the same as it is in English. The verb we are referring to, highlighted in red above, appears between the 'ne' and the 'pas' in the French sentence. This is quite typical of French negatives.

*Ne ....(verb)....pas*

Examples:

Je **ne** mange **pas** de fruits (I don't eat fruit). The verb 'manger' (to eat) is put between the 'ne' and 'pas'.

Je **ne** bois **pas** d'alcool (I don't drink alcohol). The verb 'boire' (to drink) is put between the 'ne' and 'pas'.

### III. Types of negative

As in English, French has many different types of negative. Below are more negatives in French, with their English equivalents and examples.

#### 1. *Ne...jamais : Never*

Example:

- Je ne vais jamais au parc.  
I never go to the park.

#### 2. *Ne...personne : No one/nobody/anyone*

Example:

- Je ne vois personne dans la piscine.  
I don't see anyone in the swimming pool.

#### 3. *Ne...que : Only*

Example :

- Je ne vois que des nuages aujourd'hui.  
I only see clouds today.

#### 4. *Ne...plus: Anymore/ No more*

Examples:

- Je ne chante plus.  
I don't sing anymore.
- Il n'y a plus de chocolat.  
There is no more chocolate.

## 5. *Ne...rien: Anything/ Nothing*

Examples:

- Je ne regrette rien.  
I don't regret anything.
- Il ne peut rien dire.  
He can't say anything.

## 6. *Ne...ni...ni: Neither...nor*

Example:

- Je ne mange ni de viande ni de poisson.  
I eat neither meat nor fish.

## 7. *Ne...aucun(e): None (at all)*

'Aucun' is used when we refer to a masculine noun. An 'e' is added to make 'aucune' when we refer to a feminine noun.

Example:

- Il n'y a aucun problème. ('Aucun' is used because 'problème' is masculine)  
There is no problem (at all).
- Il n'y a aucune raison pour cela. ('Raison' is feminine, so we add an 'e' to 'aucun')  
There is no reason (at all) for that.

Note well!

- ❖ If you use 'ne' before a vowel or a silent 'h', it becomes 'n'. For example, 'Je n'ai rien à faire aujourd'hui' (I have nothing to do today). 'Ne' has changed its form because of 'ai', which begins with a vowel.
- ❖ Negatives are often followed by 'de' in French, which replaces 'un'/'une'.

# MCQ

1. What is the general rule for French negatives?

- a)The verb is placed after the 'ne...pas'
- b)The verb is placed before the 'ne...pas'
- c)The verb is placed between 'ne' and 'pas'
- d)The verb is placed either before or after 'ne...pas'

2. How do we know if a sentence is negative?

- a)It will seem pessimistic
- b)It will include a negative word e.g. 'don't', 'nothing', 'nobody' etc.
- c)It will contain the word 'no'
- d)None of the above

3. Which word do we often see after French negatives?

- a)Un/une
- b)Des
- c)De
- d)Le/la

4. Which does this negative mean in English? : 'Ne...rien'

- a)Anything/nothing
- b)No one
- c)Don't
- d)No more

5. Which negative means 'don't' in French?

- a)Ne...personne
- b)Ne...rien
- c)Ne...jamais

d)Ne...pas

6. How do we say 'nobody' in French?

a)Ne...jamais

b)Ne...ni...ni

c)Ne...personne

d)Ne...pas

7. What does 'never' translate to in French?

a)Ne...jamais

b)Ne...rien

c)Ne...personne

d)Ne...pas

8. What does 'ne...que' mean in English?

a)Not...that

b)Only

c)Nobody

d)Nothing

9. What is 'ne...ni...ni' in English?

a)Neither...nor

b)Either...or

c)Nobody

d)None (at all)

10. When does 'ne' become 'n'?

a)It doesn't

b)It is used like this for every negative

c)Before the letter 'h'

d)Before a vowel or a silent 'h'

Answers:

1. C

2. B

3. C

4. A

5. D

6. C

7. A

8. B

9. A

10. D