

Using Negative Words Correctly

Two negative words in the same clause or sentence are often referred to as a double negative. In formal or business situations, **double negatives** should be avoided.

Contractions that end in *n't* are negative words, and so are the words *hardly*, *scarcely*, and *barely*. Here are some other common negative words:

never	no	none	not
nothing	nobody	no one	nowhere

To correct a double negative, remove one of the negative words.

Double negative: Keith couldn't find the folders nowhere.
Standard: Keith couldn't find the folders anywhere.
Standard: Keith could find the folders nowhere.

Circle the double negatives in each sentence. If the sentence does not have a double negative, write *Correct* on the line.

- The secretary doesn't see no mistakes in the letter. _____
- The workers don't hardly know where to begin. _____
- I wasn't asking for any special favors. _____
- Didn't no one look at a map before we got into the car? _____
- Ellen didn't ever expect to be elected club president. _____
- Our neighbors haven't said nothing to us about building a fence. _____
- Doesn't nobody want to see that horror movie with me? _____
- I don't want to go nowhere until this storm ends. _____
- My children can't hardly get to see their grandparents anymore. _____
- The waiter offered Shaylah black pepper, but she didn't want none. _____

B Practice

Circle the word that completes each sentence correctly.

1. I couldn't (never, ever) give a speech to a crowd of people.
2. The thief stole the necklace when no one (was, wasn't) looking.
3. Didn't (nothing, anything) addressed to me come in today's mail?
4. Mom offered me some spaghetti, but I couldn't eat (none, any).
5. Kevin hasn't been (anywhere, nowhere) east of the Mississippi River.
6. Tess couldn't read (none, any) of the fine print at the bottom of the coupon.
7. I wouldn't want (anyone, no one) else to be my maid of honor.
8. We knew Carrie was sick when she didn't want (anything, nothing) for dinner.
9. Bill never had (no, any) interest in skydiving until now.
10. There (were, weren't) scarcely enough doughnuts for everyone to have one.

Read the paragraph and look at the numbered, underlined parts. Choose the answer that is written correctly for each underlined part.

Fire safety is of primary importance when you are camping. Clearly, (11) no one wants to see no flames destroying the beauty of our forests. When (12) you enjoy a campfire, don't take no chances. Stay by the fire at all times. (13) When you go to bed, never leave no embers burning. Douse them with water and make sure they are not touching one another. If everyone follows these simple rules, we will all enjoy our forests for many years.

11. A no one hardly wants to see flames
B nobody wants to see flames
C nobody never wants to see flames
12. F don't take any chances
G never take no chances
H don't never take no chances
13. A you shouldn't leave barely any
B don't never leave any
C never leave any

C**Apply**

Read each sentence. If it contains a double negative, rewrite it correctly on the line. If it uses negative words correctly, write *Correct*.

1. Moira's car won't never start on cold mornings.

2. I didn't hardly have time to relax before I had to cook dinner.

3. I don't want none of you to worry about me.

4. Won't this speaker ever get to the point?

5. My cat doesn't jump onto the furniture no more.

6. Erika didn't want nothing to spoil her perfect evening.

7. Don't let no one in while I am away.

8. Nancy never wants no mushrooms on her pizza.

9. We haven't gone anywhere together in a long time.

10. Lamar never has no time to watch TV anymore.

D**Check Up**

Read each set of sentences. Choose the sentence that uses negative words correctly.

1. A Wendy couldn't understand none of the pilot's words.
B No one could teach that dog no tricks.
C Doesn't anybody have some change for the parking meter?
D I don't have nothing more to say to you.
2. F Tony couldn't find anything on the menu that he wanted.
G I can't never find the Big Dipper in the sky.
H Jake doesn't go nowhere without his wallet.
J Lauren wouldn't let nobody give her a loan.
3. A There wasn't no lifeguard on duty that night.
B I couldn't eat no more pie right now.
C Aunt Jean didn't ever forget our birthdays.
D One storm wasn't scarcely over before the next one began.
4. F I can't never get my checking account to balance.
G Pat can't find none of the pencils she just bought.
H There isn't nothing I like better than a walk by the ocean.
J Today's forecast doesn't say anything about rain.

Read each sentence and look at the underlined words. Choose the answer that is written correctly for the underlined words.

5. You can't hardly expect me to remember everything.
A can't never expect
B can hardly expect
C can't scarcely expect
D Correct as it is
6. Matt hasn't never taken any classes in computer science.
F has never taken no
G hasn't never taken no
H hasn't ever taken any
J Correct as it is
7. Mike won't let anything distract him from his job.
A won't let nothing
B won't hardly let anything
C never lets nothing
D Correct as it is
8. Adam never shares none of his lunch with his friends.
F never shares any
G doesn't share none
H doesn't never share any
J Correct as it is