

Avoiding Negative Sentences

Write affirmative sentences because they are usually clearer than negative sentences. With negative sentences, your readers have to comprehend the important words in the sentence and negate them. Sentences with more than one negative are even harder to understand. In addition, a negative sentence is usually longer than its affirmative “translation,” so the affirmative sentence is more concise.

You will often have to change other words when you “translate” a negative sentence. Look for negatives like *not* or *no* and for contractions with *n't* (such as *didn't*).

Examples:

Negative: He did not fail the exam.

Affirmative: He passed the exam.

Negative: The committee did not consider the facts.

Affirmative: The committee ignored the facts.

Unless you want to emphasize a negative word, write the affirmative form. Here are some common negatives and their affirmative forms:

Negative

not able
not certain
not clearly
not different
not many
not possible
not the same as
did not
did not accept
did not allow
does not have
not old enough
did not remember

Affirmative

unable
uncertain
unclearly
alike/similar
few
impossible
different from
failed to
rejected
prevented
lacks
too young
forgot

Exercise A:

Revise these sentences so they are affirmative rather than negative.

1. They did not forget to water the flowers
2. Not many people can swim a mile
3. Reducing inflation is not possible if the government is not able to reduce spending.
4. Do not continue the medicine unless dizziness does not stop within five hours.
5. It was not clear whether she said her grandparents were not old enough to retire.
6. The usher did not allow them to enter the theater because they did not have their tickets.
7. This shirt is not the same shirt we bought last week.
8. Since our schedules are not the same this semester, having lunch together will not be possible.
9. Sue did not consider that Maria might not want to see that movie.
10. I was not able to hear the lecture very well because the teacher did not speak clearly.

Exercise B:

Revise one of your essays so that it has only affirmative sentences. Discuss the changes with your instructor or a consultant at the Writing Center.