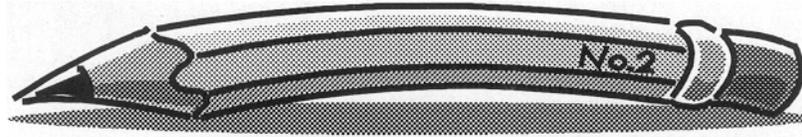


Your Name: _____



GRAMMAR PRACTICE

Avoiding Double (or Multiple) Negatives

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A rule of formal grammar is that speakers should avoid using double negatives because if we say something like, “I don’t see no paper,” a logical interpretation could be that since the speaker does NOT see NO paper, then the speaker must be looking at some paper. If there is actually no paper, it would have been better for the speaker to have said, “I don’t see any paper,” or “I see no paper.” Speakers probably make the mistake of using double negatives because it seems like a natural way to emphasize negation as when we tell a baby who is about to touch something dangerous, “No, no!” or “No, Stop!”

Another reason that speakers make the mistake is that they use *not* with such words as:

hardly scarcely barely

These words already communicate a negative sense, so if you say, “I can’t hardly understand you,” the interpretation could be that you fully understand the person. A clearer sentence would be, “I can hardly understand you,” or “I cannot understand you.”

One way to help discover whether or not you have used double negatives in a paper is to read your paper aloud. Reading contractions as the two separate words that they are may help you to see if you have used two negatives. For example, you would probably be more likely to recognize the double negatives in “I would not do no drugs,” than you would in “I wouldn’t do no drugs.”

PRACTICE EXERCISE

Rewrite the following sentences so that they do not use double negatives.

1. I didn’t hardly notice you cut your hair.

2. I didn’t get no beans.

3. She wouldn't get no credit for her answers.

4. She is not barely old enough to be a mother.

5. You didn't hardly finish your beans.

6. Her handwriting wasn't scarcely legible.

7. Her answers were not incorrect.

8. The gas truck was not inflammable.

9. The teacher didn't think she deserved no credit.

10. I'm surprised that you won't get no money.

Suggested rewrites: 1. I hardly noticed you cut your hair. 2. I didn't get any beans. 3. She would get no credit for her answers, 4. She is barely old enough to be a mother. 5. You hardly finished your beans. 6. Her handwriting was scarcely legible. 7. Her answers were correct. 8. The gas truck was flammable. 9. The teacher thought she deserved no credit. 10. I'm surprised that you won't get money.

Lesson Created by Jennifer Ann Parsons