

Writing Clear Sentences: 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 then 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	Affirmative
not able	unable
not certain	uncertain
not clearly	unclearly
not different	alike/similar
not many	few
not possible	impossible
not the same as	different from
did not	failed to
did not accept	rejected
did not allow	prevented
did not consider	ignored
does not have	lacks

not old enough too young
did not remember 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 inflammation 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 as the shirt we bought last week.
8. Since our schedules are not the same this semester, having lunch 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.