



# Formal English for Professionals

## Avoiding Multiple Negatives

- Corinne V.

# Multiple Negatives

Identify all the negative forms in this sentence:



The CEO can't have thought about not holding the meeting late at the end of the working week when the staff can barely think after an exhausting week of not leaving the office before 7pm on any of the days.



# 3 reasons why we should avoid multiple negatives



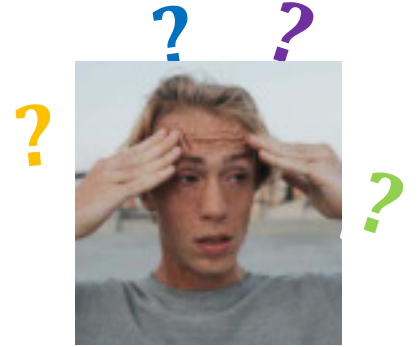
## 3 reasons why we should avoid multiple negatives

1. **-ive + -ive often = +ive**
2. **Leads to lack of clarity**
3. **Leads to longer sentences**



# Why should we avoid multiple negatives?

1. -ive + -ive often = +ive
2. Leads to lack of clarity
3. Leads to longer sentences



Match the reasons with the sentences below:

- a. A police officer who has no fewer than 25 years of service but has not yet reached the age of 60 is not eligible for early retirement.*
- b. I haven't not finished the presentation.*
- c. The Board of Directors was not unconvinced by his arguments.*

- **Strategies to adopt (1)**

The Board of Directors was not unconvinced (inc.) by his arguments.

- Choose a positive adjective and match a negative verb with it  
*... was unconvinced...*
- Choose a negative adjective and match a positive verb with it  
*... was not convinced...*
- Use qualifying adverbs  
*... was not completely/ totally/ fully convinced...*
- Be clear in your mind, know what you wish to say

- **Strategies to adopt (2)**

English has a number of adverbs that can express a sense of *scarcity*, *insufficiency*, or *inadequacy*.

... the staff can barely think...

– These carry a negative meaning

My manager is seen as a man of few words. He barely speaks during meetings but he doesn't miss anything!

– Should be used with a positive verb

The CEO's resignation was hardly surprising.

– Should be used with other positive adverbs

Meetings at Halibut Inc scarcely ever start on time.

- **Strategies to adopt (3)**

**Words/ phrases which express a negation**

No fewer/ lesser than...

Nothing, nobody, nowhere etc...

Without

Never

Neither/ nor

None of...

- **Strategies to adopt (3)**

**Words/ phrases which express a negation**

No fewer/ lesser than...

Nothing, nobody, nowhere etc...

Without

Never

Neither/ nor

None of..

**no other negative form in the sentence!**

# Which of the below sentences are incorrect?



1. I can't say that I disapprove of your decision.
2. Without knowing the exact Terms and Conditions, I can't take a decision.
3. Please don't discard any drafts as we may need them for later revisions.
4. My colleague doesn't never share information in a timely manner.
5. The reviewing board aren't unimpressed by my arguments.
6. In times of financial difficulties, many companies hardly have any readily available cash.
7. She didn't barely understand the instructions.
8. Our boss scarcely gives us time to settle down before he calls us in for our morning stand-up meetings.

# Correct the sentences below.



1. My colleague doesn't never share information in a timely manner.
2. The reviewing board aren't unimpressed by my arguments.
3. I can't say that I disapprove of your decision.
4. She didn't barely understand the instructions.

# Back to the original example



The CEO **can't have thought** about **not holding** the meeting late at the end of the working week when the staff **can barely think** after an exhausting week of **not leaving** the office before 7pm on any of the days.





# Image references



Meeting Image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/fNmUtZQwErM>

Confused boy image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/qDY9ahp0Mto>

Confused man Image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/rWJ2RthM-gc>

Woman Image: <https://unsplash.com/photos/HBABoZYH0yI>

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