

# Negative questions

## Introduction



"**Don't** you want to watch this film with me?" "No, thanks. I want to finish my book."

## Definition

These are **closed questions** which use negative rather than affirmative verbs. They can be used in different tenses.

## Construction

'To be'	Auxiliary (modal) verbs	Other verbs
'be' + 'not' + subject	auxiliary + 'not' + subject + main verb	'do' + 'not' + subject + verb
<b>Aren't</b> you hungry?	<b>Won't</b> we finish on time?	<b>Didn't</b> he go to the seminar?
<b>Wasn't</b> it interesting?	<b>Haven't</b> you had lunch?	<b>Don't</b> you like skiing?
<b>Isn't</b> there any cake?	<b>Can't</b> you swim?	<b>Doesn't</b> he work in Toulouse?

'be' + 'not' +  
subject

**Aren't** you hungry?

**Wasn't** it  
interesting?

**Isn't** there any  
cake?

auxiliary + 'not' + subject +  
main verb

**Won't** we finish on time?

**Haven't** you had lunch?

**Can't** you swim?

'do' + 'not' + subject +  
verb

**Didn't** he go to the  
seminar?

**Don't** you like skiing?

**Doesn't** he work in  
Toulouse?

### Note that

1. We can also use a non-contracted form, especially if we want to be more emphatic or show how we feel. For example, to show:

Surprise:

**Are you not** hungry?

**Do you not** like skiing?

**Can you not** swim?

Anger or frustration:

**Have you still not** finished?

**Are you not** listening to me?

**Did he not** go to the seminar after all?

2. Other negative words are possible. For example:

**Is there no** cake?

**Can no one** here find a solution?

**Do you never** eat cheese?

**Is there no** cake?

**Can no one** here find a solution?

**Do you never** eat cheese?

# Uses

Use	Examples
To show surprise or disappointment	<p><b>Didn't</b> you enjoy your holiday?</p> <p><b>Wasn't</b> there any internet access in the room? How unprofessional!</p> <p><b>Aren't</b> you going to apply for the job? - you're perfect for it.</p> <p><b>Haven't</b> you ever been in a plane?</p>
Looking for confirmation	<p><b>Didn't</b> you work with him in the IT department?</p> <p><b>Haven't</b> we already talked about this?</p> <p><b>Wouldn't</b> it be better to wait until next week?</p>
To express an opinion	<p><b>Isn't</b> this weather terrible?</p> <p><b>Wasn't</b> that a good speech?</p> <p><b>Hasn't</b> he done a great job?</p>

**Note that** negative questions can sound aggressive, sarcastic or disapproving - in fact, this is sometimes the intention - so be careful. For example:

**Aren't** you going to offer me a coffee?

**Haven't** you checked your email today?

## Responses to negative questions

When we use negative questions, we are expecting a certain response- we think we know what it will be - but whether this is 'yes' or 'no' depends on the kind of question. Of course, we might not get the answer we're expecting. For example:

**Don't** you have any money? **Â—** No, I don't (have any money). [expected answer]

**Don't** you have any money? **Â—** Yes, I do (have some money). [possible but not

expected answer]

Here are some examples based on the uses above:

Use	Expected and likely response -we agree with the speaker	Other possible responses - not expected by the speaker
Surprise or disappointment	" <b>Didn't</b> you enjoy your holiday?" " <u>No</u> , it was a disaster!"	" <b>Didn't</b> you enjoy your holiday?" " <u>Yes</u> , it was great. Why did you think that?"
Confirmation	" <b>Didn't</b> you work with him in the IT department?" " <u>Yes</u> , I did. It was when we first joined the company."	" <b>Didn't</b> you work with him in the IT department?" " <u>No</u> , it was in R&D."
Opinion	" <b>Isn't</b> this weather terrible?" " <u>Yes</u> , it is. I can't wait for the summer."	" <b>Isn't</b> this weather terrible?" " <u>Not really</u> . I actually like the rain."

## Examples