

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
Aren't you hungry?	Won't we finish on time?	Didn't he go to the seminar?
Wasn't it interesting?	Haven't you had lunch?	Don't you like skiing?
Isn't there any cake?	Can't you swim?	Doesn't he work in Toulouse?

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Aren't you hungry?	Won't we finish on time?	Didn't he go to the seminar?
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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	Didn't you enjoy your holiday? Wasn't there any internet access in the room? How unprofessional! Aren't you going to apply for the job? - you're perfect for it. Haven't you ever been in a plane?
Looking for confirmation	Didn't you work with him in the IT department? Haven't we already talked about this? Wouldn't it be better to wait until next week?
To express an opinion Note that these are sometimes called rhetorical questions and might be seen with an exclamation mark rather than a question mark.	Isn't this weather terrible? Wasn't that a good speech? Hasn't he done a great job?

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

Don't you have any money? — 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	" Didn't you enjoy your holiday?" " No , it was a disaster!"	" Didn't you enjoy your holiday?" " Yes , it was great. Why did you think that?"
Confirmation	" Didn't you work with him in the IT department?" " Yes , I did. It was when we first joined the company."	" Didn't you work with him in the IT department?" " No , it was in R&D."
Opinion	" Isn't this weather terrible?" " Yes , it is. I can't wait for the summer."	" Isn't this weather terrible?" " Not really . I actually like the rain."

Examples