

CHAPITRE SIX

LES EXPRESSIONS NEGATIVES

To make a simple negative statement, question, or command in French, “ne...pas” is placed around the verb.

REMEMBER:

In simple tenses, “ne” precedes the verb and “pas” follows it

In compound sentences, “ne” precedes the auxiliary verb and “pas” follows it

When using inversion, “ne” precedes the inverted subject-verb construction and “pas” follows it

In a command (imperative form), “ne” precedes the verb and “pas” follows it

With a negative infinitive, “ne pas” is placed between the main verb and the infinitive.

A negative statement, question, etc can be reinforced, or made stronger, by adding “du tout” to the “ne...pas” expression. “Pas du tout” can also be used alone as a negative answer to a question. A negative statement, question, etc. can be qualified or made more precise, by adding “encore” to “ne...pas.”

NOTE: indefinite articles (un/une/des) that follow negative expressions are replaced by “de.”

NOTE: the expression “ne...que,” which means only, is often included with negative expressions, although technically it only limits the verb, rather than negates it. The second part of the expression (que) always directly precedes the word it modifies.

“Ne...jamais” negates the adverbs souvent, quelquefois, parfois, toujours, and de temps en temps. It functions the same way as “ne...pas.” Jamais can be used alone to answer a question. Jamais can also be used alone in a positive context to mean ever.

“Ne...plus” is used to indicate a negative change in a situation, and it is sometimes used to negate the adverbs “encore” and “toujours” when they mean still.

“Ne...personne” and “ne...rien” function in similar ways as negative constructions. When used as a subject, both parts of the negative expression precede the verb, and the verb is always in the singular*. When used as a direct object, “ne” precedes the verb and “personne/rien” follows it. If the verb is in a compound tense, the placement of “personne” and “rien” as direct objects is not the same. “Rien” precedes the past participle, whereas “personne” follows it. When used as the object of a preposition, both “personne” and “rien” follow the preposition. Both “personne” and “rien” can be used alone as negative answers.

- Personne n’aime la télé-réalité.

NOTE: if “personne” or “rien” is modified by an adjective, the adjective is always masculine and must be preceded by “de.”

- Cet acteur ne parle de rien d'intéressant dans son interview.

"Ne...ni...ni" is used to oppose two people, things, or ideas. "Ne" precedes the verb, as usual, but "ni...ni" directly precedes the words they modify. Partitive and indefinite articles are dropped in this construction, but definite articles remain.

NOTE: when "ne...ni...ni" is negating the subject rather than the object in a sentence, the verb is generally plural

- Ni ma mère ni mon père n'aiment les films d'horreur

The "ne...aucun(e)" negative expression can function in various ways in a sentence. As a subject pronoun, "aucun" takes the gender of the noun it replaces and is followed by a singular verb. As an adjective, "aucun" agrees in gender with the noun it modifies, the adjective and noun are always singular.

The affirmative response to a negative question or statement is "si," not "oui."