Double Negatives

1. Focus

Explain Double Negatives

**Say:** We use negative words when we talk or write about something we don’t have, something that doesn’t happen, or something that doesn’t exist. Most negative words are adjectives or adverbs. Some negative words include never, not, none, and hardly. A double negative is when two or more negative words are used in the same sentence. Double negatives are not used in English writing. We need to watch out for double negatives in our speech and writing.

**Say:** I’m going to read aloud three sentences. Two of the sentences use negatives correctly, and the other sentence uses negatives incorrectly. The incorrect sentence includes a double negative. I want you to tell me which sentences are correct.

Model Using Negatives Correctly

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

**INCORRECT:** No slaves could never attend church.
**CORRECT:** Slaves could not attend church.
**ALSO CORRECT:** Slaves couldn’t attend church.
**ALSO CORRECT:** No slaves could attend church.

**Modeling Text**

**Ask:** Which sentences use negatives correctly, and how do you know? Allow responses.

**Say:** The first sentence contains a double negative. The words no and never are negatives. It is incorrect in English to use two negatives in the same sentence. The other sentences show how the negatives should be used in the sentences. I can use either no or not in a sentence, but I can’t use both words in one sentence. Also, there might be a negative within a contraction, such as in the example couldn’t. I should still watch for a double negative in a sentence with a contraction.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Identify double negatives used in sentences.
- Revise sentences with double negatives.

Preparation

**Materials Needed**
- Chart paper and markers
- Double Negatives (BLM 8)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

**Advanced Preparation**
If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and the practice text (with errors) onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, write the sentence frame in “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper to use for EL support.
2. Rehearse

Practice Revising Sentences with Double Negatives

Display the practice text (with errors) on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Ask students to form pairs. Invite pairs to revise the practice sentences to avoid the use of double negatives. (Students do not need to copy the sentences.) Remind students that there is more than one way to revise each sentence.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

1. She could not find no one anyone to help her when she needed it.
2. Explorers searched for gold, but they didn’t find found none.
3. The plantation didn’t change nothing anything today.

Practice Text

Share Revised Sentences with Double Negatives

Invite pairs to share how they revised the sentences. Discuss their responses. Ask them if they found it harder to identify a double negative when one of the negatives was in a contraction.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that negatives are words that are used to refer to something that is missing or that you don’t have. We also learned that writers should avoid using more than one negative in the same sentence. These are called double negatives. Remember to read over your biographies to make sure you correct any sentences that contain double negatives.

If you would like to give students additional practice revising sentences with double negatives, have them complete BLM 8.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share their answers to BLM 8. Provide corrective feedback as necessary.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

The concept of double negatives may be too difficult for beginning ELs. You may want to have them just practice using negatives in sentences. Use simple objects around the classroom, for example, a book or pen. Hold up the book. Say: I have a book. Then place the book on the table, open your hands, and Say: I do not have a book. Ask students to repeat with the book or other objects in the classroom.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair students with fluent English speakers to revise sentences and to complete the BLM. Use this sentence frame to help students discuss negatives with their partners and the class:

The negative word in this sentence is _______.

Using double negatives is grammatically correct in Spanish and other foreign languages. For example, the Spanish equivalent of “I don’t see anything” translates literally into English as “(I do) not see nothing.” Consequently, adapting to the English rules governing double negatives may be difficult for some Spanish speakers. Offer additional support to these students as they write.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share this English/Spanish cognate: negative/negativo(a).