Questions & Negatives

CEFR C2 · Interrogation and negation at the limits: corpus, pragmatics and style
WS1 Negation: Morphology & Change · WS2 Corpus & Pragmatic Precision · WS3 Style, Voice & Marked Syntax · WS4 Scholarly Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Negation — Morphology & Change

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: Negation Is Not One Thing

English negation is realised across several layers: clausal (*not* / n't), constituent (*not unlike*), morphological (*un-, in-, dis-, -less*), and lexical (inherently negative verbs like *deny, doubt, fail, lack*). These layers differ in scope, in the polarity items they license, and in their historical trajectory — *ne … not* gave way to *not* (Jespersen's Cycle), and *do*-support is itself a relatively recent syntactic innovation.

Layer	Realisation	Note
Clausal	n't / not + auxiliary	widest scope; licenses NPIs
Constituent	not unreasonable, not all	litotes; partial negation
Morphological	un-, in-, dis-, non-, -less	lexicalised; scope frozen
Inherently negative	deny, doubt, fail, refuse, lack	license NPIs without *not*
Metalinguistic	It's not "good", it's superb.	negates the form, not the truth

Part A – Theoretical Analysis

1. Explain, with reference to **Jespersen's Cycle**, why Standard English lost the preverbal *ne* and how *do*-support later filled the structural gap in questions and negatives.
2. *I doubt he'll come* and *I don't think he'll come* both license the NPI *either* (*…, and I don't either*). What does this reveal about "inherently negative" verbs and the concept of **downward entailment**?
3. Litotes (*not unattractive*) is often said to "mean the positive". Argue against the naïve equivalence *not unattractive* = *attractive*, using scope and implicature.

Part B – Prescriptive Claims

Evaluate each: accept, partially accept, or reject, with evidence.

#	Claim	Evaluation
1	"A double negative always makes a positive."	
2	"You must never end a question with a preposition."	
3	"'Ain't' is not a legitimate negator."	
4	"'Aren't I?' is a grammatical error for 'amn't I?'."	

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Corpus & Pragmatic Precision

Name: _____ *Date:* _____ *Level: C2 (CEFR)*

Reference: What Corpora Reveal About Questions & Negation

At C2, competence is collocational and pragmatic. Corpora show that negative questions cluster by function and register; that *n't*-contraction vs full *not* is register- and focus-sensitive; and that certain NPIs (*whatsoever, in the slightest, a wink*) are frozen in narrow collocational frames.

Pattern	Corpus tendency
Don't you think…?	conversational; seeks alignment
Do you not…? (uncontracted)	formal, emphatic, sometimes hostile
… whatsoever	fixed after *no / none / any*: "no doubt whatsoever"
not … in the slightest	intensified denial; spoken & journalistic
needn't have vs *didn't need to*	counterfactual vs simple non-necessity

Part A – Collocational Discrimination

For each pair, state which is the natural collocation and why. Neither is ungrammatical.

#	Pair	More natural & reason
1	a) no doubt whatsoever b) no doubt at all whatsoever	
2	a) I didn't sleep a wink b) I didn't sleep a moment	
3	a) not in the slightest b) not in the smallest	
4	a) needn't have worried b) didn't need to worry	

Part B – Counterfactual Negation

Explain the difference in factual implication.

1. a) You needn't have cooked. b) You didn't need to cook. _____
2. a) I couldn't have known. b) I couldn't know. _____
3. a) She can't have left. b) She mustn't leave. _____

Part C – Register-Corpus Map

Place each form in its most likely corpus: *Don't you agree? · Do you not concede? · ain't · whatsoever · Might one not argue…? · innit*

Corpus	Forms
Academic / formal debate	
Legal / parliamentary	
Journalistic	

Informal / dialectal / spoken	

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Style, Voice & Marked Syntax

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: The Interrogative & Negative as Stylistic Resources

Marked question and negation forms are deployed for rhetorical effect: anaphoric rhetorical questions build cumulative force; litotes signals ironic understatement or English reticence; fronted negation lends gravity or archaism; the uncontracted negative can sound cold, formal, or menacing. Recognising and deploying these consciously is the C2 benchmark.

Effect	Device	Example
Cumulative persuasion	anaphoric rhetorical Qs	Was it fair? Was it wise? Was it even legal?
Ironic understatement	litotes	The reception was not entirely warm.
Gravity / archaism	negative fronting	Nor shall we falter.
Coldness / threat	uncontracted *not*	I do not recall inviting you.
Feigned deliberation	self-addressed question	But what, one asks, was the alternative?

Part A – Identify the Effect

1. "The results were not unimpressive." (academic review) _____
2. "Do you not think you have said enough?" (courtroom) _____
3. "Never again would such a chance arise." (memoir) _____
4. "Who has not, at some point, felt this?" (essay) _____

Part B – Deliberate Choice

Rewrite each neutral sentence twice — (a) with litotes; (b) with a fronted or uncontracted negative — then note what each choice changes about tone and implied speaker.

#	Neutral	(a) Litotes	(b) Fronted / uncontracted
1	The plan was quite good.		
2	I was very annoyed.		
3	We will not surrender.		

Part C – Pastiche

Write three sentences of parliamentary rhetoric using anaphoric rhetorical questions and at least one litotes; then recast the same content as a flat, neutral news summary.

#	Version
1	
2	
3	

4	
5	
6	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Text Analysis

Is negation truly the opposite of assertion, or merely another way of asserting? The question is not idle. Not once in the modern grammatical tradition has negation been treated as semantically inert; on the contrary, it is precisely where scope, polarity and presupposition are thrashed out. Consider litotes — that most English of devices — by which one says *not unwelcome* and means, one supposes, rather more than *welcome*: the detour through negation is not without cost, nor without a certain sly pleasure. And who, hearing "I'm not saying she lied," has ever failed to hear the accusation the disclaimer pretends to withhold?

1. Identify every negation in the passage and classify each by layer (clausal, constituent, morphological, inherently negative, metalinguistic).
2. The passage turns on two rhetorical questions. Reconstruct the assertion each encodes and assess the persuasive gain over a plain declarative.
3. Analyse "not without cost, nor without a certain sly pleasure": name the figure, and explain how the double litotes calibrates the claim.
4. "failed to hear" is an inherently negative verb under a rhetorical question. Show how this double licensing works and what it presupposes about the hearer.

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening two paragraphs (220–260 words) of a scholarly essay on: "Negation and interrogation are not deficits of the declarative but instruments of a more exact meaning."

Requirements — include and underline: (1) one **litotes** used precisely; (2) one instance of **negative fronting with inversion**; (3) one correctly licensed **NPI** in a fixed collocation; (4) one **metalinguistic term** (scope, polarity, presupposition, downward entailment, Jespersen's Cycle) used correctly; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to each claim; (6) one **conjunct** that maps the argument's logic precisely.

#	Line
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	

8	

Features: _____ / 6 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Questions & Negatives

Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 Jespersen's Cycle: OE preverbal *ne* was reinforced by postverbal *not* (< *nawiht*), then *ne* was lost, leaving *not* alone. As finite lexical verbs stopped raising to a negation/ tense position, negation and inversion could no longer attach to the lexical verb; *do*-support emerged (16th–17th c.) as a semantically empty carrier of tense, agreement and polarity, giving *She did not go / Did she go?* · 2 *doubt* is downward-entailing in its complement, creating an affective context that licenses NPIs just as clausal *not* does; "inherently negative" verbs are thus definable by their entailment behaviour, not by containing a negative morpheme. · 3 *not unattractive* negates *unattractive* but, by implicature, falls short of full *attractive*: the litotes conveys a hedged, qualified positive plus a pragmatic overlay (understatement/irony) absent from the plain adjective. Scope: two negations that cancel semantically need not cancel pragmatically.

Worksheet 1 – Part B (model)

1 Reject as a universal — true only for two logical negations in the same clause with cancelling scope; in many dialects a "double negative" is negative concord (emphatic, not cancelling). · 2 Reject — stranded prepositions in questions are standard English ("What are you looking at?"); the "rule" is an imported Latinism. · 3 Partially accept — *ain't* is non-standard in formal writing but a long-attested, rule-governed negator in many dialects; "not legitimate" confuses register with grammar. · 4 Reject — *amn't I* exists dialectally (Irish/Scots); Standard English fills the paradigm gap with *aren't I*, a conventionalised, not erroneous, form.

Worksheet 2 – Part A

1 a — *whatsoever* already maximises; "at all whatsoever" is redundant. · 2 a — *sleep a wink* is a frozen NPI idiom; "sleep a moment" breaks the collocation. · 3 a — *in the slightest* is fixed; "in the smallest" is not idiomatic. · 4 both grammatical but different: (a) counterfactual (you did worry, needlessly); (b) simple absence of necessity (may or may not have worried).

Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

1 a) presupposes you did cook — and it was unnecessary; b) leaves open whether you cooked. · 2 a) counterfactual: I did not and could not have known then; b) a general past inability. · 3 a) epistemic: it is impossible that she has left (deduction); b) deontic: she is not permitted to leave (prohibition).

Worksheet 2 – Part C

Academic/formal debate: Might one not argue…? · Legal/parliamentary: Do you not concede? · Journalistic: Don't you agree? (also whatsoever) · Informal/dialectal: ain't, innit, whatsoever (colloq. intensifier).

Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 litotes — ironic academic understatement; "not unimpressive" praises while withholding enthusiasm. · 2 uncontracted negative question — cold, hostile, controlling in cross-examination. · 3 negative fronting + inversion — elegiac gravity; foregrounds finality. · 4 rhetorical question with inherently-negative frame — universalising ("everyone has").

Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 a) The plan was not at all bad. b) Not for nothing was the plan approved. — (a) hedges/ understates; (b) adds emphatic, formal cadence. · 2 a) I was not exactly delighted. b) Never had I

been so annoyed. — litotes masks feeling; fronting amplifies it. · 3 a) We are not about to give in. b) Nor shall we surrender. — (b) archaic, oratorical, Churchillian.

Part C: reward conscious control over rarity — a student who can explain why the uncontracted negative reads as cold has met the benchmark.

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 *not* idle (constituent/clausal); *Not once … has* (clausal, fronted, inversion); *inert* — *in-* here lexical but note it's not the target; *not unwelcome* (constituent litotes, morphological *un-*); *not without … nor without* (double constituent litotes); *failed to hear* (inherently negative verb); "I'm not saying" (metalinguistic). · 2 Q1 asserts that negation IS another mode of assertion (not its mere opposite); Q2 asserts everyone hears the smuggled accusation. The interrogative co-opts the reader into supplying the conclusion, harder to resist than a bald claim. · 3 double litotes; two *without*-negations qualify the claim to a hedged positive ("some, appreciable cost/pleasure") while performing the very reticence it describes. · 4 *fail* is downward-entailing and licenses the reading under the rhetorical (affective) question; together they presuppose that hearing the accusation is universal — no one has NOT heard it.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Litotes	Used precisely, with controlled implicature	0–6
Fronting / inversion	Negative fronting with correct inversion	0–5
NPI collocation	Licensed NPI in a natural fixed frame	0–5
Metalinguistic accuracy	Term used correctly, no overclaiming	0–5
Epistemic calibration	Two hedges matched to claim strength	0–5
Argument & length	220–260 words; contestable claim developed	0–5

The C2 benchmark is not the use of a rare form but conscious control: the student who writes *not unwelcome* and can explain, in a footnote, why it says more than *welcome* has demonstrated mastery.