

Saying no with ne and pas

French 1 (high school) · Lesson

Quick answer: To make a French sentence negative, put **ne** before the conjugated verb and **pas** after it: Je ne parle pas allemand. Before a vowel or silent h, ne becomes **n'**. After a negative, un, une and des become de or d': Je n'ai pas de frère.

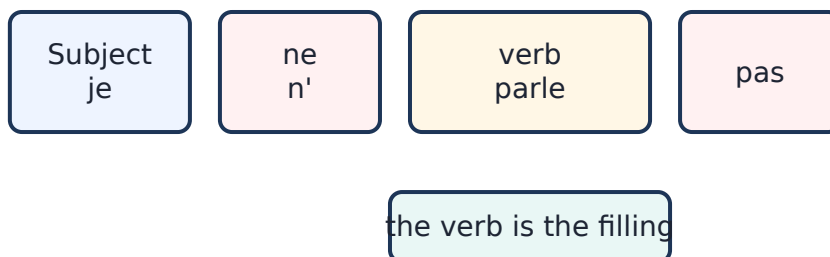
Level: French 1 (high school, ACTFL Novice) · **Standards:** ACTFL Novice Mid, WL 1.1 Interpersonal, WL 1.2 Interpretive, WL 1.3 Presentational

Where do ne and pas go?

Rule: ne + verb + pas

To make a sentence negative, put **ne** before the conjugated verb and **pas** right after it. Before a vowel sound or a silent h, ne becomes **n'**.

Affirmative	Negative
Je parle allemand.	Je ne parle pas allemand.
Tu joues au foot.	Tu ne joues pas au foot.
Elle habite à Nice.	Elle n' habite pas à Nice.
Nous aimons danser.	Nous n' aimons pas danser.



The negative sandwich: ne + verb + pas.

In a sentence with two verbs, only the conjugated verb gets the sandwich: Je n'aime pas nager. — I don't like to swim. The same pattern works for être and avoir: Il n'est pas là. — He isn't here. Nous n'avons pas cours. — We have no class.

What happens to un, une and des after a negative?

Rule: pas de

After a negative, un, une, des become **de** (or **d'** before a vowel). The quantity is zero, so the article disappears.

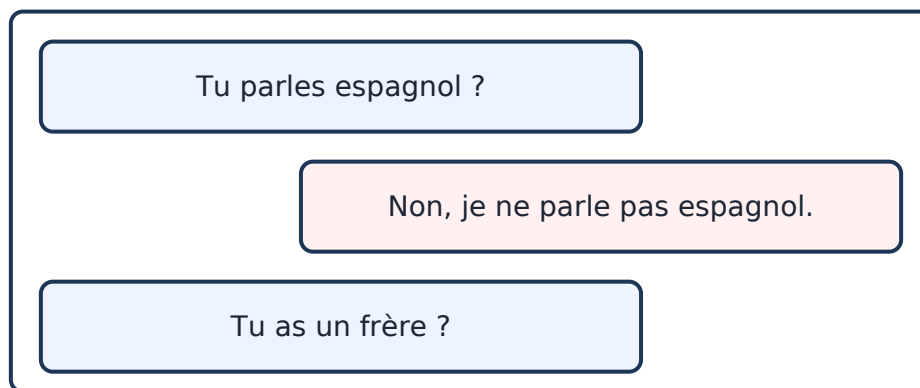
Examples

- J'ai un frère. → Je n'ai pas de frère. — I don't have a brother.
- Il y a des chaises. → Il n'y a pas de chaises. — There are no chairs.
- Elle a un ordinateur. → Elle n'a pas d'ordinateur. — She doesn't have a computer.

Articles le, la, l' and les do not change: Je n'aime pas le basket. — I don't like basketball. After c'est, un stays too: Ce n'est pas un problème.

How do you answer a question negatively?

Start with Non, and repeat the verb in a full negative sentence.



A question, a negative answer.

Answers: Non, je ne parle pas espagnol. — No, I don't speak Spanish. Non, je n'ai pas de frère. — No, I don't have a brother. A polite refusal is simply Non, merci.

Common mistakes

English uses "do not" before the verb, but French has no helper verb: Je ne parle pas, never Je ne fais pas parler. Do not forget ne, and do not put pas before the verb. Also remember pas de: Je n'ai pas de chien, not Je n'ai pas un chien.

Zoé's tip

Think of a sandwich: ne is the top bread, pas is the bottom bread, and the conjugated verb is the filling. If the filling starts with a vowel, the top bread shrinks to n'.

Culture note

In everyday conversation, French speakers often drop ne and say J'aime pas ça or Je sais pas. In writing, at school and on exams, keep both parts.

Key points to remember

- Negative sandwich: ne + conjugated verb + pas.
- Ne becomes n' before a vowel sound or silent h.
- Un, une, des become de or d' after a negative.
- Le, la, les do not change after a negative.
- Answer a question with Non, plus a full negative sentence.

Saying No With Ne and Pas: frequently asked questions

Where does pas go in a French sentence?

Place pas directly after the conjugated verb. In Je n'aime pas nager, pas follows aime, not the infinitive.

Why do I write Je n'ai pas de frère and not un frère?

After a negative, un, une and des become de or d'. The negative expresses zero, so the article is reduced.

Does the article change after je n'aime pas?

No. Definite articles stay the same: Je n'aime pas le basket. Only un, une and des change.

Do French speakers really say ne?

In writing and formal speech, yes. In casual conversation, many speakers drop it and say J'aime pas ça. Keep both parts in class and on exams.

How do I answer a yes/no question negatively?

Say Non, and repeat the verb in a negative sentence: Tu parles espagnol ? — Non, je ne parle pas espagnol.