

SKILL 8: LISTEN FOR DOUBLE NEGATIVE EXPRESSIONS

It is possible for two negative ideas to appear in one sentence, and the result can be quite confusing.

Example from the Paper and Computer TOEFL® Tests  

On the recording, you hear:

(man) *I can't believe the news that I heard about the concert.*

(woman) *Well, it isn't impossible for the concert to take place.*

(narrator) *What does the woman say about the concert?*

In your test book or on the computer screen, you read:

(A) There's no possibility that the concert will take place.

(B) The concert will definitely not take place.

(C) The concert might take place.

(D) The concert can't take place.

The correct answer to this question is answer (C). If it *isn't impossible* for the concert to take place, then it is possible, and the modal *might* indicates possibility.

The following chart outlines the situations where double negatives can occur:

DOUBLE NEGATIVES		
Situation	Example	Meaning
negative word (e.g., <i>not</i> , <i>no</i> , <i>none</i>) and a negative prefix (e.g., <i>in-</i> , <i>un-</i> , <i>dis-</i>)	He didn't like the <i>unclean</i> office.	did <i>not</i> like <i>unclean</i> office = liked clean office
two negative verbs	It <i>isn't</i> snowing, so they <i>aren't</i> going to the mountains.	implies that they would go if it were snowing
<i>neither</i> or <i>not ... either</i>	Sue <i>didn't</i> like the movie, and <i>neither</i> did Mark.	both did not like the movie

EXERCISE 8: In this exercise, underline the two negatives in the last line of each short dialogue. Then read the question and choose the best answer to that question. Remember that two negatives can make the sentence positive.

1. (man) *Paula, you worked so hard setting up the field trip.*
 (woman) *I hope no one's unhappy with the arrangements.*
 (narrator) *What does Paula mean?*

- (A) She hopes everyone will be pleased.
 (B) She knows no one is happy with what she has done.
 (C) She's arranged to take a trip because she's unhappy.
 (D) Everyone's happy with the condition of the field.

2. (woman) *How was your history exam?*
 (man) *I didn't study enough, so I didn't do well.*
 (narrator) *What does the man mean?*
- (A) He studied a lot and passed.
 (B) He failed in spite of his effort.
 (C) He got a good grade even though he didn't study.
 (D) His grade was poor because of inadequate preparation.
3. (man) *Were your friends able to get tickets for the concert?*
 (woman) *Mark couldn't get tickets for the concert, and neither could Paul.*
 (narrator) *What does the woman mean?*
- (A) Although Mark couldn't get both tickets, Paul did.
 (B) Both were unable to obtain tickets.
 (C) Neither Mark nor Paul wanted to go to the concert.
 (D) Mark tried to get tickets, but Paul didn't.

TOEFL EXERCISE 8: In this exercise, listen carefully to each short dialogue and question on the recording, and then choose the best answer to the question. You should be particularly careful of double negatives.



NOW BEGIN THE RECORDING AT TOEFL EXERCISE 8.

1. (A) He'll definitely be elected.
 (B) The election is now complete.
 (C) She has high hopes for his chances.
 (D) It may happen.
2. (A) Both parts of his game were bad.
 (B) He served better than he volleyed.
 (C) Some parts of his game were better than others.
 (D) He played rather well.
3. (A) It is a surprise that he was prepared.
 (B) He was not ready, as usual.
 (C) He prepared a really big surprise.
 (D) His strong preparation came as no surprise.
4. (A) She felt good enough to go out.
 (B) She went out to get some medicine.
 (C) She felt like dancing, so she went out with everyone.
 (D) She stayed home because she was sick.
5. (A) She has problems that others aren't aware of.
 (B) Others aren't aware of her problems.
 (C) She knows she's been a problem.
 (D) She doesn't have a care in the world.
6. (A) Steve wanted to finish his paper, and so did Paul.
 (B) Both Steve's and Paul's papers were incomplete.
 (C) Steve and Paul were busy doing their term papers.
 (D) When Steve wasn't able to finish his paper, Paul couldn't help.
7. (A) It wasn't George's responsibility to pay the bill.
 (B) Bill was irresponsible about paying George's rent.
 (C) George acted carelessly by not taking care of the bill.
 (D) George took responsibility for the unpaid bill.
8. (A) It's fortunate that he was accepted.
 (B) It's good that he wasn't admitted.
 (C) Fortunately, the university didn't admit him.
 (D) It's too bad he was rejected.