

English Corner 12: positive and negative

Style rather than grammar dictates that different words are used in positive and negative contexts. The major groups of alternative words that require thought before use in these situations are listed below.

Either and neither, each, both, as well

- **Either** and **neither**. The most familiar example is the difference between **Either ... or** and **neither ... nor**, with the former used for **positive contexts** [After this treatment the transport of **either** carnitine **or** inositol *should change*] but the latter for **negative contexts** [After this treatment the transport of **neither** carnitine **nor** inositol *was changed*]. In both these cases the verbs are **positive** and the **negative sense** is provided by the negation of the subject (**neither** means **not either**) and the **positive sense** by **either**. When a **negative** verb is used, however, **either** can express the **negative** condition; for example, when the positive sense is given by **each, both** or **as well**.
- **Either** and **each**. When the **positive sense** is given by a **positive** verb and **each** [Ligation *affects each* parameter] or **each of** [Ligation *affects each of* them], the **negative sense** is created by a **negative** verb and **either**, not **each** [Ligation *does not affect either* parameter. Ligation *does not affect either of* them]. When the subject rather than the verb is negated by **neither** or **neither of**, a **positive** verb is used for the **negative context** [Ligation *affects neither* parameter. Ligation *affects neither of* them].
- **Either** and **both**. When a **positive sense** is given by **both of** [It *affects both of* them] or **both ... and** [Sperm motility *was affected* by **both** quinine **and** verapamil], **either of** or **either ... or** is used, not **both**, to create the opposite sense with a **negative** verb [It *does not affect either of* them. Sperm motility *was not affected* by **either** quinine **or** verapamil]. A **positive** verb is used when the subject rather than verb is negated by **neither of** [It *affects neither of* them] or **neither ... nor** [Sperm motility *was affected* by **neither** quinine **nor** verapamil].
- **Either** and **as well**. A response in agreement with a **positive** statement in a question [I *can see* the cytoplasmic droplets, can you?] will employ **as well** (meaning **as well as you can**) with a **positive** verb [Yes, I *can see* the cytoplasmic droplets **as well**], but a response agreeing with a **negative** statement [I *can't see* the cytoplasmic droplets, can you?] **either**, not **as well**, is used [No, I *can't see* the cytoplasmic droplets **either**].

Any and some

- **any** is used in **negative** contexts [I *did not find any* hydrogen peroxide. If there *aren't any*, he won't find them] and **some** is used in the corresponding **positive** contexts [She *found some* hydrogen peroxide. If there *are some*, she'll find them].
- **any** is used in **negative** answers [No I *don't have any* paperclips] and **some** is used in **positive** answers [Yes, I *have some* paperclips].
- **any** is used in questions [Do you have **any** scissors?] where there is **doubt** as to whether there are scissors at all, but **some** is used in questions [May I borrow **some** paperclips?] where there is no doubt that paper clips are available.

- **any** is used in *conditional* clauses [*If* you have read **any** of his articles, you would know his style] and **some** is used in *main* clauses [You have read **some** of his articles and **know** his style].

All of, everyone, someone and no one

- When **no one** or **none** (meaning **not any**) is used as a *negative* subject with a *positive* verb [**No one wants** to do it. **No one is obliged** to turn up on Saturday. **None** of the patients **have** cryptorchidism] the opposite context also employs a *positive* verb but **no one** or **none** is replaced with **someone** [**Someone wants** to do it], **everyone** [**Everyone is requested** to turn up on Saturday] or **all of** [**All of** the patients **have** cryptorchidism].

No and yes

- The use of a **yes** or **no** for answering questions stated in the *positive* [Q: **Are you** coming?] is comprehensible since these words are consistent with the nature of the reply, either positive [A: **Yes, I am**] or negative [A: **No, I am not**]. However, the *negative* (**no**), rather the *positive* (**yes**) that may be expected in a confirmatory remark, is used for an expected *agreement* with a question that is *negative* [Q: You **won't be** coming will you? A: **No, I won't**], but this apparently illogical device similarly emphasises the negative response.

And and or

- Whereas **and** is used in *positive* statements [Both eating **and** drinking **are** allowed in the social room], **nor** should be used for *negative* statements [**Neither** eating **nor** drinking **is** permitted in the laboratory].
- In the former, the sense is that each activity linked by the coordinate conjunction is permitted individually (Eating is allowed. Drinking is allowed. **Both** eating [is allowed] **and** drinking is allowed, followed by *ellipsis* of the repeated **is allowed**, and conversion to the plural following **and**: both eating and drinking **are** allowed).
- In the latter, again each activity is forbidden on its own (Eating is not permitted. Drinking is not permitted) but the negatives are linked with **or** with a *negative* verb [Eating **or** drinking **is not** permitted in the laboratory] or with a *positive* verb and a negation of the subject by **no** [**No** eating **or** drinking **is** permitted in the laboratory] or **neither ... nor** [**Neither** eating **nor** drinking **is** permitted in the laboratory].

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