

French Negation — Simple, Double & Triple

Grammar Capsule & Compare-and-Contrast Cheat Sheet — companion to the drill

Part 1 -- Grammar Capsule

The Six Negators

Standard French negation wraps the conjugated verb (or the auxiliary, in compound tenses) in two parts: **ne** ... **[negator]**. In spoken French, *ne* is frequently dropped ("Je sais pas"). In writing and formal speech, keep it.

Negator	Meaning	Example
ne ... pas	not (baseline)	Il ne vient pas .
ne ... jamais	never	Il ne vient jamais .
ne ... plus	no longer / not anymore	Il ne vient plus .
ne ... rien	nothing	Il ne dit rien .
ne ... personne	nobody	Il ne voit personne .
ne ... aucun(e) + noun	no / not a single [noun]	Il n'a aucune idee.

Position in Simple Tenses

In simple tenses (present, etc.), all six negators sit right after the conjugated verb, in the same slot *pas* would occupy -- no asymmetry yet.

*Je ne mange **jamais** de viande. -- Je ne connais **personne** ici.*

Rien and Personne Can Also Be the Subject

When *rien* or *personne* is the grammatical subject (not the object), it moves to the front, before *ne* -- a different slot from the object use above.

***Rien** n'est parfait. -- **Personne** n'est venu.*

Aucun(e) Agrees With Its Noun

Aucun is not invariable -- it agrees in gender with the noun it modifies, like an adjective, and is almost always singular even when the English meaning is plural ("no friends" -> *aucun ami*, not *aucuns amis*).

*Il n'a **aucun** ami. (masc.) -- Il n'a **aucune** idee. (fem.)*

Part 2 -- Double and Triple Negation

Negators combine, but only in a fixed hierarchy -- this is not free combination.

The hierarchy: plus > jamais > rien / personne

If *plus* is present, it comes first. If *jamais* is present, it comes before *rien* or *personne*. *Rien* and *personne* never combine with each other.

Combination	Meaning
ne ... plus jamais	never again
ne ... plus rien	nothing anymore
ne ... plus personne	nobody anymore
ne ... jamais rien	never anything
ne ... jamais personne	never anybody
ne ... plus jamais rien	never anything again
ne ... plus jamais personne	never anybody again

The Compound-Tense Complication (the important part)

In a compound tense (*passé composé*, *plus-que-parfait*) or a modal/*aller* + infinitive construction, the negators split around the auxiliary/modal and the participle/infinitive -- and **personne does not follow the same rule as the others**.

plus, **jamais**, and **rien** all sit **between** the auxiliary and the past participle. When combined, they keep their hierarchy order in that same slot -- the chain stays intact.

*Je n'ai **plus jamais rien** acheté la-bas. (chain intact -- all three before the participle)*

personne always gets pushed to **after** the participle or infinitive -- even when combined with *plus* and/or *jamais*. This breaks the chain.

*Je n'ai **plus jamais** vu **personne** de cette époque. (chain breaks -- personne ejected to the end)*

Pattern	What happens
Je n'ai plus jamais rien vu.	Chain intact -- rien stays in the pre-participle slot with plus jamais.
Je n'ai plus jamais vu personne .	Chain breaks -- personne is ejected to after the participle.

This is the single highest-value pattern to automatize. Object pronouns don't change the rule -- they simply attach right before the conjugated auxiliary/modal, and the negators still wrap around from there: *Je ne leur ai plus jamais rien caché.* (never hid anything from them again)

Two-Question Self-Check

- Which negators are present, and what order does the hierarchy put them in? (plus, then jamais, then rien/personne)
- Is *personne* one of them? If yes, it goes after the participle/infinitive no matter what else is in the sentence. If no, everything stays together before the participle/infinitive.

Part 3 -- Adjacent Forms: ne...que and ne...point

Both forms share the *ne ... X* frame with real negation without being negation. *Point* stays out of the drills entirely -- it's a register marker, not an active-vocabulary item. *Que* is different: it's woven directly into the negation drills below as a lookalike option, because learners misread it as negation on first exposure and only reparse it as "only" with practice.

ne ... que -- Restrictive, Drilled as a Negation Lookalike

Ne ... que means "only" -- a **restrictive** structure, not a negation. It restricts a noun, quantity, or circumstance rather than negating the verb, and behaves like *seulement*.

*Je n'ai **que** deux euros.* (I only have two euros -- not "I don't have two euros.")

Que now appears as a chip/option alongside *pas*, *jamais*, *plus*, *rien*, *personne*, and *aucun(e)* at every level. In Level 1 it pairs with full articles (*du/de la/des/le/la/les*), since *que* -- unlike the true negators -- doesn't drop the partitive to bare *de*. In Level 2 it fills the same post-participle slot as *personne*. In Level 3 the idiom *ne ... plus ... que* ("only X left/remaining") drills the trap directly: *plus* alone means "no longer," but adding *que* flips the meaning to a restriction, not a negation.

ne ... point -- Literary / Archaic Register

Ne ... point means "not" -- functionally close to *ne ... pas* -- but belongs to a literary, archaic, or regional register (Moliere, La Fontaine; some Norman and Belgian usage), not ordinary modern French.

*Je **ne** sais **point**.* (I do not know -- literary tone)

Why it's flagged, not drilled: it isn't part of the active negation system a learner needs for automaticity in contemporary French -- worth recognizing when reading, not worth drill repetitions.

Part 4 -- Compare-and-Contrast Cheat Sheet

Placement at a Glance (compound tenses)

Negator(s)	Slot before participle/infinitive	Slot after participle/infinitive
jamais	jamais	--
rien	rien	--
personne	--	personne
aucun(e) + noun	--	aucun(e) + noun
plus jamais	plus jamais	--
plus rien	plus rien	--
plus personne	plus	personne
jamais rien	jamais rien	--
jamais personne	jamais	personne
plus jamais rien	plus jamais rien	--
plus jamais personne	plus jamais	personne

Negator(s)	Slot before participle/infinitive	Slot after participle/infinitive
plus que (restrictive, not negation)	plus	que

Classic Minimal Pairs (the ones that get confused)

Pair	Difference
jamais rien vs. plus jamais rien	"never anything" vs. "never anything again" -- the second implies it used to happen.
jamais personne vs. plus jamais personne	Same distinction, but personne still ejects to after the participle in both.
rien (object) vs. Rien (subject)	Je ne vois rien. vs. Rien ne va. -- same word, opposite side of the verb.
ne ... plus vs. ne ... que	"no longer" vs. "only" -- plus negates, que restricts. Easy to conflate since both use ne.
ne ... pas vs. ne ... point	Same meaning ("not"), different register -- point is literary/archaic, pas is everyday.

Other Ways to Practice This Beyond the Drill

- Write 5 original sentences about your own life using a double-negation combo each -- not drilling isolated verbs.
- Pick a French news article or blog post and highlight every negation. Classify each one (simple, double, triple; where personne lands) before checking.
- When you hit a plus jamais / jamais rien / plus jamais personne sentence while reading, pause and say the placement rule out loud before moving on.
- Say the two-question self-check out loud before answering in the drill ("what's the hierarchy order -- and is personne in there?") -- narrating the reasoning builds the habit faster than silent guessing.
- Revisit this cheat sheet specifically after a missed-item practice round, to test whether the review actually improved recall rather than just feeling like it did.

Companion reference sheet for the Negation drill.