



Grammar Tidbit #18 Double Negatives



A double negative uses **two negative words** in the same clause to express a **single negative idea**:

We **didn't** see **nobody**. [= We saw nobody.]

She has **never** written to **nobody**. [= She has never written to anybody.]

From a logical standpoint, two negative elements invalidate each other, thus giving a positive statement. Accordingly, even though double negatives are standard in many Romance languages (including Italian), they were abolished in standard English some time after the 16th century on account of their **logical inconsistency**. Although they are still widely used in **English dialects**, they should be avoided in all but very informal situations; just use a single negative instead:

We **didn't** see **anybody**.

She has **never** written to **anybody**.

There is one single exception to this logical principle, and that's the following:

I am **not unconvinced** by his argument.

In such a case, the double negative creates a **shade of meaning** that would not be present if the speaker just said 'I am convinced by his argument'.

