

Dr. Shirley's Greek Courses

Grammar

Negation

Greek has two words for "not" : οὐ and μη

οὐ is used with the indicative mood of a verb,
μη with all other moods and with infinitives and participles.

When followed by a word beginning with a smooth vowel, οὐ becomes οὐκ.

When followed by a vowel with a rough breathing, οὐ becomes οὐχ

In questions, οὐ, οὐχ, οὐχι is used if the answer "yes, of course" is expected,
μη, μητι is used when the answer "no, of course not" is expected,
or for hesitant questions "Could it be that . . . ?"

eg.

οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι . . . ; Don't you know that . . . ? (Romans 6:16)

μητι ἔγω' Ιουδαίος ; I'm not a Jew, am I ? (Pilate speaking, John 18:35)

In Greek, it is grammatically correct to use a double negative, which corresponds to a simple negative in English. eg

ἔμε οὐκ ἐρωτήσετε οὐδεν. "You will ask nothing of me." or "You will not ask anything of me." -
literally "you will not ask nothing of me." (John 16:23)

For a strong prohibition, both words may be used together : οὐ μη with the Aorist Subjunctive or Future Indicative

εἰ μη is usually best translated as "except"

Other ways of expressing negation :

ἀ— (alpha privative) as a prefix to a noun or verb, equivalent to un- eg ἀκαθαρτος

οὐδεις, οὐδεμια, οὐδεν, μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν pronoun and adjective - no-one, nobody, no

οὐδε, μηδε negative conjunction, disjunctive particle - and not, nor, neither, not even, but not

οὐδεποτε, μηδεποτε adverb - never

οὐδεπω, μηδεπω adverb - not yet

οὐκετι, μηκετι adverb - no longer, no more, no further

οὐπω, μηπω adverb - not yet

οὔτε, οὔτε . . . οὔτε, μητε, μητε . . . μητε adverb - and not, neither . . . nor,

οὐχι intensive form of οὐ no, certainly not, by no means, not at all

μητι interrogative particle, expecting the answer "No, of course not" - certainly not

μηδαμως, μηθαμως adverb - no, by no means, certainly not

μηποτε conjunction and particle - never, not . . . lest, whether perhaps

μηπου conjunction - lest