

Mistake #9 Using “不 (bù)” to negate past action

For Past Action

To indicate that an action DID NOT happen in the past, use the negation word “没(méi)” or “没有(méi yǒu)” . “有(yǒu)” is optional.

Since “没 (méi)” is used exclusively to negate “有(yǒu)” , when you see “没 (méi)” by itself, you know that “有 (yǒu)” is assumed. “没 (méi)” = “没有(méi yǒu)” .

If you think about it, it makes sense to use “没 (méi)” or “没有 (méi yǒu)” to negate past action, because “没有 (méi yǒu)” literally means “not have” and it’ s the same as in English, “not have done something” .

Examples

| English | Pinyin | Chinese |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| I didn’ t eat breakfast. | wǒ méi (yǒu) chī zǎo fàn 。 | 我没(有)吃早饭。 我没(有)吃早飯。 |
| I have never been to China. | wǒ méi (yǒu) qù guò zhōng guó 。 | 我没(有)去过中国。 我没(有)去過中國。 |

For Present and Future Action

To indicate that an action DOES NOT happen in the present or WILL NOT happen in the future, use the negation word “不 – bù” .

Examples

| English | Pinyin | Chinese |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| I don’ t like him. | wǒ bù xǐ huān tā 。 | 我不喜欢他。 我不喜歡他。 |
| I don’ t want to go. | wǒ bù xiǎng qù 。 | 我不想去。 |
| I won’ t go to China tomorrow. | wǒ míng tiān bú qù zhōng guó 。 | 我明天不去中国。 我明天不去中國。 |
| It won’ t rain tomorrow. | míng tiān bú huì xià yǔ 。 | 明天不会下雨。 明天不會下雨。 |

Exercise - Compare these two sentences:

| English | Pinyin | Chinese |
|------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| (1) I don' t eat breakfast. | wǒ bù chī zǎo fàn 。 | 我不吃早饭。 我不吃早飯。 |
| (2) I didn' t eat breakfast. | wǒ méi chī zǎo fàn 。 | 我没吃早饭。 我沒吃早飯。 |

(1) 我不吃早饭 - wǒ bù chī zǎo fàn

It means "I don' t eat breakfast" . When you use "不 – bù" to negate a verb, it means the action doesn' t happen or will not happen. This sentence implies that I don' t have the habit of eating breakfast. I just don' t do that.

(2) 我没吃早饭 - wǒ méi chī zǎo fàn

It means "I haven' t eaten breakfast or I didn' t eat breakfast." Maybe I forgot to eat breakfast or maybe I didn' t have time to eat breakfast, the result is that I didn' t have breakfast.