Questions & Negatives

CEFR C1 · Interrogation, negation and pragmatic force
WS1 Rhetorical & Biased Questions · WS2 Negative Polarity & Scope · WS3 Cleft, Echo & Fronting · WS4 Critical Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Rhetorical & Biased Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Questions That Aren't Asking

At C1 the interrogative form is a rhetorical resource. A question can assert (*rhetorical question*), presuppose a leaning (*biased question*), soften a directive, or convey irony. Negative questions in particular carry a bias toward the positive answer the speaker expects.

Type	Form / signal	Force
Rhetorical	Who could possibly disagree?	asserts "no one"
Positive-biased	Isn't it obvious?	expects "yes"
Negative-biased	Surely you don't believe that?	expects "no"
Conducive tag	You wouldn't lie to me, would you?	pressures agreement
Deliberative	Why not simply ask them?	suggestion, not query

Part A – Identify the Bias

State the answer the speaker expects (yes / no) and the pragmatic effect.

#	Question	Expected answer & effect
1	"Haven't I always supported you?"	
2	"You didn't seriously agree to that, did you?"	
3	"Who in their right mind would refuse?"	
4	"Wouldn't it be wiser to wait?"	
5	"Is anything ever simple with them?"	

Part B – Rewrite as a Rhetorical Question

Convert each assertion into a rhetorical question with equivalent force.

1. Everyone knows this is unfair. → _____
2. Nobody could have predicted this. → _____
3. There is no point in arguing. → _____

Score: ____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Negative Polarity & Scope

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Items That Need a Negative

Negative polarity items (NPIs) such as *any, yet, ever, at all, budge, a red cent, lift a finger* are licensed only in negative, interrogative, or otherwise "affective" contexts. Their distribution reveals the true **scope** of negation in a clause.

Context	NPI licensed?	Example
Plain negative	yes	He hasn't **ever** helped.
Question	yes	Have you **any** idea?
only / hardly / few	yes (affective)	Few people said **anything**.
before / without	yes	She left **without** saying **anything**.
Plain positive	no (*)	*He has **ever** helped.

Part A – Grammatical or Not?

Mark ✓ or ✗. If ✗, explain which item is unlicensed and why.

#	Sentence	✓/✗ & reason
1	I doubt he'll ever change.	
2	She agreed at all with the plan.	
3	Hardly anyone lifted a finger to help.	
4	He gave a red cent to charity last year.	
5	Seldom do they budge on price.	

Part B – Scope Ambiguity

Each sentence is scope-ambiguous. Paraphrase the two readings.

1. All that glitters is not gold. _____
2. You can't work with anyone here. _____
3. The report wasn't approved because it was late. _____

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Cleft, Echo & Fronting

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Reference: Restructuring for Focus

Cleft sentences (*It was X that…, What X did was…*) and echo questions redistribute focus and can carry negation into a marked position. Fronted negatives trigger subject–auxiliary inversion; clefts do not.

Device	Example	Function
It-cleft	It wasn't the cost that worried her.	focus + contrastive negation
Pseudo-cleft	What he didn't do was apologise.	focus on the omission
Echo question	You did **what**?	surprise / request to repeat
Negative fronting	Not for a moment did I doubt it.	emphatic; inversion
Neg. + only cleft	It was only later that we knew.	restrictive focus

Part A – Rewrite as a Cleft

1. Her tone, not her words, offended them. → It _____.
2. He simply refused to explain. → What _____.
3. We only understood the risk afterwards. → It was only _____.

Part B – Inversion vs Cleft

Both structures add emphasis. Rewrite each sentence **twice**: (a) with negative fronting + inversion; (b) with an it-cleft. Note what each foregrounds.

#	Neutral sentence	(a) Fronting	(b) Cleft
1	I realised the truth only then.		
2	She never once complained.		
3	The delay, not the cost, caused the failure.		

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Critical Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C1 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Reading

> Is it not curious that we treat the question mark as a mark of ignorance? In debate, the most devastating move is rarely an assertion; it is the question that no opponent can answer without conceding the point. Not once, in the whole exchange, did the minister venture a direct claim — and yet who could say she had conceded anything at all? What she offered instead were questions: loaded, biased, impossible to answer cleanly. Never had evasion looked so much like candour.

1. Identify every rhetorical or biased question and state the answer each presupposes.
2. The passage contains two instances of negative fronting with inversion. Locate them and convert each to neutral order, commenting on what is lost.
3. Analyse "anything at all": which item is the NPI, and what licenses it here?
4. Evaluate the claim that a question can be "more devastating than an assertion". Use the notion of presupposition in your answer.

Part B – Extended Analytical Writing

Write a formal analytical paragraph of 160–200 words responding to: "In skilled hands, the interrogative is a more powerful instrument of persuasion than the declarative."

You must include and underline: (1) one **rhetorical question**; (2) one instance of **negative fronting with inversion**; (3) one **cleft** carrying negation or focus; (4) one correctly licensed **negative polarity item**; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to claim strength.

#	Line
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

Features: _____ / 5 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C1 Level, Questions & Negatives

Worksheet 1 – Part A

1 yes — reproach dressed as a reminder; presupposes constant support. · 2 no — incredulous; the tag pressures the hearer to disavow. · 3 no one (rhetorical) — asserts that refusal is irrational. · 4 yes — a softened suggestion, not a genuine query. · 5 no ("never") — weary rhetorical complaint.

Worksheet 1 – Part B (model)

1 Who doesn't know this is unfair? · 2 Who could possibly have predicted this? · 3 What is the point in arguing?

Worksheet 2 – Part A

1 ✓ (*ever* licensed under *doubt*). · 2 ✗ — *at all* is an NPI; a plain positive clause doesn't license it ("agreed at all"). Fix: "didn't agree at all". · 3 ✓ (*anyone / lift a finger* licensed by *hardly*). · 4 ✗ — *a red cent* is an NPI; unlicensed in the positive. Fix: "didn't give a red cent". · 5 ✓ (*budge* licensed by fronted *seldom* + inversion).

Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

1 a) Not everything that glitters is gold (partial — intended). b) Nothing that glitters is gold (total — the illogical literal reading). · 2 a) There is no one here you can work with. b) It is not the case that you can work with just anyone (you're selective). · 3 a) It wasn't approved, and the reason is its lateness. b) It was approved, but not because it was late (negation over the *because*-clause).

Worksheet 3 – Part A (model)

1 It was her tone, not her words, that offended them. · 2 What he did was (simply) refuse to explain. · 3 It was only afterwards that we understood the risk.

Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 a) Only then did I realise the truth. b) It was only then that I realised the truth. — Fronting foregrounds the adverbial and adds urgency via inversion; the cleft frames it as contrastive, implying "and not before". · 2 a) Never once did she complain. b) It was without a single complaint that she… (paraphrase). — Fronting emphasises the total absence; the cleft is clumsier here, showing fronting suits adverbial negation better. · 3 a) (no natural inversion — no negative adverbial) → use cleft. b) It was the delay, not the cost, that caused the failure. — Contrastive focus is the cleft's home ground.

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 "Is it not curious…?" (presupposes: yes, it is curious); "who could say she had conceded anything?" (presupposes: no one); implied rhetorical force throughout. · 2 "Not once … did the minister venture…" → The minister did not once venture a direct claim. "Never had evasion looked so much like candour" → Evasion had never looked so much like candour. Neutral order loses the emphatic foregrounding and the rhetorical cadence. · 3 *anything* is the NPI, licensed by the negative rhetorical question "who could say…" (an affective, downward-entailing context); *at all* reinforces it. · 4 Accept a coherent argument: a question smuggles in presuppositions the hearer must accept to answer at all, so it commits them before they respond — harder to resist than an open assertion.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor	Marks
Rhetorical force	Rhetorical question used with clear presupposition	0–5
Fronting / inversion	Negative fronting with correct inversion	0–5
Cleft & NPI	Cleft and a correctly licensed NPI	0–5
Epistemic calibration	Two hedges matched to claim strength	0–5
Argument & length	160–200 words; position developed	0–5