

Non-assertive words

There are some words which are mainly used in affirmative sentences. Examples are: some, once, already, somebody, something, sometimes, somewhere, someone etc. These words are often called assertive words.

We do not usually use assertive words in questions and negatives. Instead we use other words like any, anything, anybody, ever, yet etc. These words are often called non-assertive words.

Compare:

Somebody knocked at the door. (Assertive)

Did anybody knock at the door? (Non-assertive)

I have bought something. (Assertive)

I haven't bought anything. (Non-assertive)

I have been to the US once. (Assertive)

Have you ever been to the US? (Non-assertive)

She has already arrived. (Assertive)

She hasn't arrived yet. (Non-assertive)

Non-assertive words are used in questions and negatives. They are also used in if-clauses and with adverbs, adjectives, verbs, prepositions and determiners that have a negative meaning.

Let me know if you need any help.

I wonder if there is anything wrong with her.

She sings better than anybody else in my family.

Few people have ever seen him laugh.

I would rather do it without anybody's help.

Assertive words in questions

Assertive words are sometimes used in questions and negatives. This, for example, happens when we want to give a positive feeling to the sentence.

Non-assertive words

Did you want something? (Suggests 'I think you want something'.)