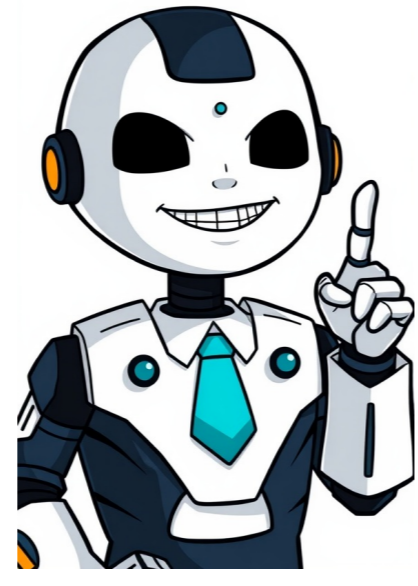


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All of them have different usages and can quite clearly defined in that different contexts. Some example sentences for no: As for the drink, there was no point in bringing that up. Carmen had given Josh no encouragement. Some examples sentences for not: I'm not too keen on that decision. That I am not prepared to say. Some example sentences for non as a prefix non-eligible non-human After quite some time searching I couldn't find any rules in which those words obey to. As you can see in my linked sites though there are quite a few entries in which not is before a verb and little of any others. This is hard to draw a conclusion to make a hard and fast rule. As you can see, it is quite defined in which each word is used. I can't think of any that could be used interchangeably at the moment. I'll accept suggestions to improve this. "Un-" is defined as "a prefix meaning 'not', freely used as an English formative, giving negative or opposite force in adjectives and their derivative adverbs and nouns... and less freely used in certain other nouns." "Non-" is defined as "a prefix meaning 'not', freely used as an English formative, usually with a simple negative force as implying mere negation or absence of something (rather than the opposite or reverse of it, as often expressed by un-)." So "unchristian" means in some way opposed to Christian virtues, but "non-Christian" just means "not Christian." "Unprofessional" means not up to professional standards of behavior (not showing up for appointments, say), but "nonprofessional" just means not in a profession. Logically, then, "non-dead" might mean something like "not having died" (true of rocks and living people), and "undead" might mean "living." But word constructions don't always make sense. "Non-dead" isn't a word and "undead" means non-living and supernaturally animated. Go figure. I find many words in dictionaries have a definition (necessary: definition follows), but others do no (unnecessary: not necessary) as we see here I still have to look up the word necessary to find out what not necessary means. Using the word nonsense as another example I will show sense (has definitions) but nonsense (has definitions but they are not meanings held to the prefix NOT applying without fail. In this case it is easy for me to see that nonsense versus non-sense where nonsense has acquired a new meaning SEPARATE from the applied non(not) prefix meaning should only be. So I myself, contrary to all I have read by so called 'Usage Panels' of experts who list such reasonings as 60% agree or only 39% find this acceptable or blah... from that I know this: "If you do not have an absolute rule and answer, then there isn't one, it is simply one of anyone's preference". That said, I then choose to put a hyphen between any word I choose... when I am using the implied meaning of the prefix (whether it is non(not) or otherwise) because at least I choose to make it known and not up to interpretation by any reader... what my intent is, and this is whenever I question the meanings that exist by definition that the reader may choose from. If there are too many interpretative choices in a non-hyphenated way to my liking, I will include the hyphen. Note: I can't recall at the moment, hyphenating suffixes because they generally do not change meanings or include new definitions, but rather they usually only provide characterization of an object or its action as applies to tense, inflection, mood, etc, but if used, use it the same way as a prefix. The standard, but not very satisfying, answer is that you use an EN DASH (codepoint U+2013) as a higher-order HYPHEN (codepoint U+2010). Wikipedia says: In English, the en dash is usually used instead of a hyphen in compound (phrasal) attributives in which one or both elements is itself a compound, especially when the compound element is an open compound, meaning it is not hyphenated itself. So for example, it would be a nonRed Sox game, because it is an open compound. Or when you have something that is already a compound, you need a nonchild-molester for someone who is not a child-molester, and a non-childmolester for someone who molests non-children.Or if you have a flower that is colored red-violet, then it is a red-violetoletered flower. However, opinions and recommendations and perhaps expectations and familiarity do vary regarding what to do in these situations. An example is how in the draft manuscript of my last book, we originally said (with regard to pattern matching with regular expressions) that: A \W matches a nonword character. A \H matches a nonhorizontal-whitespace character. But in copyedit, it was decided that although correct, this was too alien for normal people to immediately apprehend. So we adopted a courageous but unambiguous convention that programmers would immediately apprehend: A \W matches a non-(word character). A \H matches a non-(horizontal whitespace) character. We did it that way because we felt this style, although innovative and hardly something you will find in Strunk and White, was more likely to be clearly and immediately understood by computer programmers than carefully distinguishing en dashes from hyphens. We retained en dashes only in their two traditional and uncontroversial uses: for ranges, like values in the 128256 range or supplying 13 arguments; in dash compounds like a BoyerMoore search, which should of course not be hyphenated. See also this question for more about hyphens, en dashes, and em dashes. Note also that most North American publishers use a hyphen after non only when it precedes a capital letter, so non-British and non-European, but nonbeliever and even nonnative. British publishers are much more apt to hyphenate all non- compounds no matter the following letter, so non-believer and non-native. Just dont hyphenate nonchalant. :) Unicode Considerations In Unicode, there are more dashes than you would believe. In fact, Unicode v6.1 attributes to all these code points the Dash character property, along with their general category and script properties: U+0002D GC=So SC=Common HYPHEN MINUSU+0056A GC=Pd SC=Armenian ARMENIAN HYPHENU+005BE GC=Pd SC=Hebrew HEBREW PUNCTUATION MAQAFU+01400 GC=Pd SC=Canadian Aboriginal CANADIAN SYLLABICS HYPHENU+01806 GC=Pd SC=Mongolian MONGOLIAN TODO SOFT HYPHENU+02010 GC=Pd SC=Common HYPHENU+02011 GC=Pd SC=Common NON-BREAKING HYPHENU+02012 GC=Pd SC=Common FIGURE DASHU+02013 GC=Pd SC=Common EN DASHU+02014 GC=Pd SC=Common EM DASHU+02015 GC=Pd SC=Common HORIZONTAL BARU+02053 GC=Po SC=Common SWUNG DASHU+0207B GC=Sm SC=Common SUPERSCRIPT MINUSU+0208B GC=Sm SC=Common SUBSCRIPT MINUSU+02212 GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS SIGNU+02E17 GC=Pd SC=Common DOUBLE OBLIQUE HYPHENU+02E1A GC=Pd SC=Common HYPHEN WITH DIAERESISU+02E3A GC=Pd SC=Common TWO-EM DASHU+02E3B GC=Pd SC=Common THREE-EM DASHU+0301C GC=Pd SC=Common WAVE DASHU+03030 GC=Pd SC=Common WAVY DASHU+030A0 GC=Pd SC=Common KATAKANA-HIRAGANA DOUBLE HYPHENU+0FE31 GC=Pd SC=Common PRESENTATION FORM FOR VERTICAL EM DASHU+0FE32 GC=Pd SC=Common PRESENTATION FORM FOR VERTICAL EN DASHU+0FE58 GC=Pd SC=Common SMALL EM DASHU+0FE63 GC=Pd SC=Common SMALL HYPHEN-MINUS Note that codepoints with the general category Dash Punctuation (GC=Pd) do not include U+2212, the MINUS SIGN, which has the Math Symbol general category, GC=Sm. Here are codepoints whose names includes "DASH" but which do not have the Dash character property (which is different from the Dash Punctuation general category, perversely enough): U+000B1 GC=Sm SC=Common PLUS-MINUS SIGNU+002D7 GC=Sk SC=Common MODIFIER LETTER MINUS SIGNU+00320 GC=Mn SC=Inherited COMBINING MINUS SIGN BELOWU+02052 GC=Sm SC=Common COMMERCIAL MINUS SIGNU+02213 GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS-OR-PLUS SIGNU+02216 GC=Sm SC=Common SET MINUSU+02238 GC=Sm SC=Common DOT MINUSU+02242 GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS TILDU+02296 GC=Sm SC=Common CIRCLED MINUSU+0229F GC=Sm SC=Common SQUARED MINUSU+02756 GC=So SC=Common BLACK DIAMOND MINUS WHITE XU+02796 GC=So SC=Common HEAVY MINUS SIGNU+0293C GC=Sm SC=Common TOP ARC CLOCKWISE ARROW WITH MINUSU+02A29 GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS SIGN WITH COMMA ABOVEU+02A2A GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS SIGN WITH DOT BELOWU+02A2B GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS SIGN WITH FALLING DOTSU+02A2C GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS SIGN WITH RISING DOTSU+02A3A GC=Sm SC=Common MINUS SIGN IN TRIANGLEU+02A41 GC=Sm SC=Common UNION WITH MINUS SIGNU+02A6C GC=Sm SC=Common SIMILAR MINUS SIMILARIF you do put a non- in front of a compound adjective, you should use two hyphens (or more, if needed); in your example, it should be non-finitely-generated groups. But should you put non- in front of a compound adjective in the first place? This really depends on the example. Adding non- in front of a compound adjective can make it ambiguous; I would recommend only doing it if it's clearly non-ambiguous (like the first examples below). There are some compound adjectives that sound perfectly fine if you add non- in front of them: non-English-speaking customers, non-nuclear-powered submarines. There are some compound adjectives where the non- is ambiguous as to what it means: non-Christian-oriented organizations. Are these organizations oriented towards non-Christians, or are they organizations that are not specifically oriented towards Christians. You certainly shouldn't use ambiguous terminology. Finally, there are compound adjectives where at first sight, the non- seems ambiguous, but some thought shows that there's only one reasonable interpretation: non-blood-sucking insects. A reader's first reaction might be, "What do they suck if it's not blood?" I wouldn't use these, either. For the example you give, non-finitely-generated groups, I think it sounds fine. But there are probably lots of compound adjectives in mathematics you don't want to put a non- in front of; treat each case separately. The miscommunication between the OP and her interlocutor is an example of what sometimes happens in interaction between people whose ways of speaking are shaped by an education or professional experience that revolves around analysing phenomena in quantitative terms, and those with other kinds of backgrounds. The difference that the latter group characterises as qualitative, may be quite spontaneously characterised as quantitative by the former. (So, no, the OP is far from being the only person to have had the experience of such miscommunication.) Consider, for example, the difference between moving and standing still. To many people that is probably a very clear, definite, qualitative difference. Such people may speak of moving things as having this or that speed, but would never speak of the speed of an object that is standing still. A scientifically trained person, on the other hand, finds it quite natural to say that such an object has the speed that equals zero. In such a persons conceptual framework, the difference between moving and standing still is merely quantitative; its the difference between having the speed of zero and having some other speed. A person who is accustomed to this way of thinking may feel compelled, when speaking of things that are in fact moving, to say that they have some non-zero speed; to people on the other side, non-zero in such a context seems redundant, as they would never apply the concept of speed to motionless things. Now, the same division can be seen when people speak of probabilities. The everyday framework for conceptualising them has the concepts such as impossible, possible (but improbable), probable (likely), certain. The differences among these at first appear to be qualitativ, and are spoken of as such. People who are trained to analyse probabilities in quantitative terms, however, think of them as a continuum between zero and one. In that framework, something that is impossible is zero, something that is certain has the probability of one, and everything that is possible but not certain has some probability that is between these extremes. A person who is accustomed to that framework may feel the need to use the phrase non-zero probability or non-zero chance to make it clear that whatever is talked about is not impossible. To a person who is not accustomed to it, such a phrase seems strange, just like the non-zero speed in the above example. (Incidentally, to answer directly the question posed in the title, yes, non-zero in this context means more than zero as the scale of probabilities does not go below zero.) So, saying that something has a non-zero chance is just a way of saying that it is possible, that comes naturally to people who have a certain educational or professional background, but may be confusing to those who dont. Contrary to what the OP suspected, this way of speaking is not peculiar to Americans or to speakers of any other regional variation of the language. In fact, the whole matter is not specific to English, as analogous differences between people of different educational/professional backgrounds can probably be found among speakers of any language. Now, the miscommunication between the OP and her interlocutor had another layer that was superimposed on this. The term non-zero chance, just like the more mundane term possible, by its meaning covers a wide range, from the probabilities that are just a sliver above zero, all the way to one. However, it would be strange and misleading (but not false) to use either of these terms if one knew that the probability is very high. Although these terms do not logically entail that the probability is low, they do imply it (in the loose, everyday sense of imply), or implicate it, or suggest it. In other words they convey the idea that the probability is low, as a matter of pragmatics, but not as a matter of semantics. In computer security there is a concept known as: non-reputation! "Non-reputation refers to a state of affairs where the purported maker of a statement will not be able to successfully challenge the validity of the statement or contract." - wiki Without going into too many details, it's like having a receipt that proves that data has not been altered. Now if I had something like a letter, and was able to apply techniques of non-reputation to it, what would be the best word to describe the letter? There seem to be three terms used by experts in the field: non-reputiable, non-refutable, and non-reputable I'm inclined to think that non-reputiable is the most correct; however, the other two seem to be more commonly used in that context. Any thoughts? The news reporter said, 'The victim's injuries were non-life-threatening. [Verbatim quote, so I cannot alter the wording to say "...were not life-threatening"]. Is non-life-threatening correctly punctuated with two hyphens as shown? Or should it be nonlife-threatening in this particular context? 2 A "zero-sum game" is a reasonably well understood phrase, though often incorrectly used as "zero sun gain." The opposite of this is a "non-zero-sum game," which I find rather unwieldy. Is there a better phrase than "non-zero-sum game?" 5 @PeterShor's comment is also correct from a statistical point of view. Generally, though, we refer to the significance of a test statistic not a variable since there is no way to test whether a variable is significant, only a relationship, comparison, difference, etc. So, for example, in a regression model of y on x, the coefficient on x is non-significant | not significant. The x variable cannot be significant on its own.

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