

〜ぬ

classical negative (= ない)

Romaji: **nu**

〜ぬ is the classical negative that modern Japanese keeps for effect. It means precisely what ない means, and you build it the same way: take the ない-form and swap ない for ぬ — 知らない → 知らぬ. It survives most visibly as a noun modifier (見知らぬ人, “a stranger”), in fixed expressions (思わぬ結果, 相変わず), and at the end of sentences in literary or deliberately old-fashioned writing. する is irregular: せぬ, never ×しぬ.

構文 CONSTRUCTION

ない-form minus ない + ぬ

知らぬ人が立っていた。 — A stranger was standing there.

Modifying a noun — the commonest use by far

思わぬ結果になった。 — It led to an unexpected result.

Sentence-final, literary

彼は何も語らぬ。 — He says nothing.

する → せぬ ・ worn down further to 〜ん in speech

分からん。 — Dunno.

例文 EXAMPLES

① ^{み し}見^{ひと}知ら^たぬ人が立っていた。

A stranger was standing there.

② ^{おも}思^{けっ か}わぬ結果になった。

It turned out in a way nobody expected.

③ ^{かれ}彼^{なに}は何も^{かた}語らぬ^さまま去った。

He left without saying a word.

注意点 NUANCES

- ▶ The noun-modifying use is alive and everywhere: 見知らぬ, 思わぬ, 絶えぬ, 名も知らぬ. Recognising these as ない in costume unlocks a great deal of literary text.
- ▶ 〜ん (分からん, 知らん) is this same ぬ worn down, and it is thoroughly modern casual speech — especially in Kansai. The polite ません contains it too.
- ▶ ぬ modifies nouns and ends sentences; ず links clauses. That is the practical division of labour between the two classical negatives.
- ▶ Producing it yourself is rarely necessary and easy to overdo — unearned ぬ reads as costume drama. Recognition is the realistic goal.

やってみよう YOUR TURN

Find three 〜ぬ words hiding in plain sight — 見知らぬ, 思わぬ, and one more of your own — then rewrite each with ない to prove to yourself they are the same form.