

Some or Any ?

from Michael Swan, *Practical English Usage*, and Michael Lewis, *The English Verb*

The over-simplified rule

Use *some* in positive sentences. Use *any* in negative sentences and in questions.

The realistic rule

The above rule is true in many cases, but not always. Both *some* and *any* are used with indefinite reference; *some* is most common in affirmative clauses, and *any* is common in questions and negatives. But *some* can be used in negative sentences and questions (“Would you like something to eat?”). But we can use *any* also in affirmative clauses after words that have a negative or limiting meaning, for example *never*, *hardly*, *without*, *little* (“You never give me any help”); and *any* can also be used in *if*-clauses (“If you want any help, let me know”).

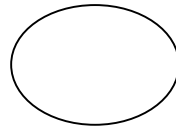
It will be helpful to consider this perspective:

Some is used if the idea is restricted or limited in some way.

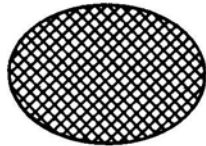
Any is used if the idea is unrestricted or unlimited.

Some applies to part; *any* applies to all or none.

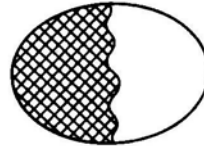
This diagram illustrates the restricted-unrestricted perspective. It represents all the pop music in the world.



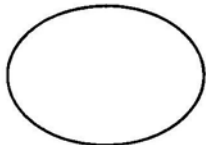
Below, the pop music that I like is shaded:



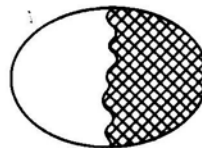
I like any pop music.



I like some pop music.



I don't like any pop music.



I don't like some pop music.

(“I like any pop music” means, in effect, “I like every kind, every singer, every song that is pop music.”)

Example sentences

Can I get you something to eat?

Can I get you anything to eat?

(According to the rules above, *something* connotes a limited offering and *anything* denotes an unlimited offering. As far as the speaker's intention and the listener's reaction are concerned, however, there is no difference between the two sentences.)

He's willing to do something for me. (There is one thing that he's willing to do for me.)
He's willing to do anything for me. (There is no limit to what he will do for me.)

He has some money.
x He has any money.

Does he have some money?
Does he have any money?

(As with "Can I get you something/anything to eat," there is no difference in meaning.)

Bring somebody to the party.
Bring anybody to the party.

(*Anybody* emphasizes that there is no restriction on whom the person may bring. However, by using *some*, the speaker is not placing a restriction on whom the person may bring.)

There's some cheese in the refrigerator.
x There's any cheese in the refrigerator.