NO NO NO (NO, NAY, Never....)

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We are cautioned in grade school to avoid use of the double negative --
that logically, the 2 negatives
cancel out, and if that is not the intention of the writer, confusion
rules. But multiple negatives do
abound, and not merely for emphasis as is "No, no a thousand times no...."

In medicine, we meet the syndrome of inappropriate secretion of
antidiuretic hormone (SIADH). It
takes more than moment to parse those 2 negatives, "inappropriate" and
"antidiuretic" to conclude that
such a patient is holding on to too much fluid, and that the treatment
become fluid restriction.

In my own field of neurology, we have the monstrous triple negative,
alexia without agraphia,
indicating damage to the brain in such a way that there is difficulty with
speaking, but not with writing.
Why not "pure alexia"? In studying aphasia, it seemed to some of my
colleagues and I that the condition
was contagious: prolonged contact with aphasic patients and the literature
of aphasia leads to nobody
being able to understand you.

And then, there are the road signs one encounters on traversing this
country - Specifically for me,
from Massachusetts to my daughter's family in Illinois. As you leave the
town of Franklin, Pennsylvania,
you encounter a sign: END BRAKE RETARDER PROHIBITION. For those for
whom this is relevant, they
are, presumably, able to follow the instructions quite quickly, since it
is, after all, a road sign. But I still
can't figure it. All right, no more brake retarder prohibition -- I get
that. End and Prohibition appear
to cancel each other, leaving one free to, well, Retard one's Brakes. But
braking is retarding, isn't it? So,
I guess you are supposed to free up your brakes to do their thing -- which
should lead to a screeching
halt. Or, does the End of the sign refer to both the Retarder and the
Prohibition? -- and the resultant
to the braking would quickly get you into Ohio.

Looking closely at these 4 words, it appears that we have a true 4-word
quadruple negative -- maybe unique in the language.

I suggest that, considering the ambiguities of this sign, one might be
coaxed into joining (if one were
a Franklinite) a counterorganization called DON'T END BRAKE RETARDER
PROHIBITION.