

## Inversion

## Inversion

The term inversion covers two different grammatical operations:

- Using a question form of the main verb  
*Not only did he fail to report the accident, but also later denied that he had been driving the car.*  
*Never have I enjoyed myself more!*
- Changing the normal positions of verb and subject  
*Along the street came a strange procession.*  
See Grammar 12 for an explanation of this example.

## Inversion after negative adverbials

- This only occurs when the adverbial occurs at the beginning of a clause.  
All the examples below are used in formal language, usually for rhetorical effect, such as in political speeches. They are not usual in everyday spoken language. Compare:  
*Never have I heard a weaker excuse!*  
*I have never heard a weaker excuse!*
- Time expressions: *never, rarely, seldom*  
These are most commonly used with present perfect or past perfect, or with modals such as *can* and *could*. Sentences of this type often contain comparatives.  
*Rarely can a minister have been faced with such a problem.*  
*Seldom has the team given a worse performance.*  
*Rarely had I had so much responsibility.*
- Time expressions: *hardly, barely, scarcely, no sooner*  
These refer to an event which quickly follows another in the past. They are usually used with past perfect, although *no sooner* can be followed by past simple. Note the words used in the contrasting clause.  
*Hardly had the train left the station, when there was an explosion.*  
*Scarcely had I entered the room when the phone rang.*  
*No sooner had I reached the door than I realized it was locked.*  
*No sooner was the team back on the pitch than it started raining.*
- After only  
Here only combines with other time expressions and is usually used with past simple.  
*Only after posting the letter did I remember that I had forgotten to put on a stamp.*  
Other examples are only *if/when, only then, only later*.  
Note that when only refers to the state of being the only one, there is no inversion following it.  
*Only Mary realized that the door was not locked.*

- Phrases containing *no/not*  
These include *under no circumstances, on no account, at no time, in no way, on no condition, not until, not only ... (but also)*.  
*On no condition are they to open fire without a warning.*  
*Not until I got home did I notice that I had the wrong umbrella.*

- Little  
Little also has a negative or restrictive meaning in this sense.  
*Little does the government appreciate what the results will be.*

Inversion after *so/such* with *that*

- This occurs with *so* and adjectives when the main verb is *be*. It is used for emphasis and is more common than the example with *such*.  
*So devastating were the floods that some areas may never recover.*
- *Such* used with *be* means 'so much/so great'.  
*Such was the force of the storm that trees were uprooted.*
- As in the examples with *such*, inversion only occurs if *so/such* is the first word in the clause.

Inverted conditional sentences without *if*

- Three types of *If*-sentence can be inverted without *If*. This makes the sentences more formal and makes the event less likely.  
*If they were to escape, there would be an outcry.*  
*Were they to escape, there would be an outcry.*  
*If the police had found out, I would have been in trouble.*  
*Were the police to have found out, I would have been in trouble.*  
*If you should hear anything, let me know.*  
*Should you hear anything, let me know.*  
*If he has cheated, he will have to be punished.*  
*Should he have cheated, he will have to be punished.*  
*If I had known, I would have protested strongly.*  
*Had I known, I would have protested strongly.*
- Inversion after *as*  
This is more common in formal or written language.  
*We were short of money, as were most people in our neighbourhood.*  
*I thought, as did my colleagues, that the recession would soon be over.*
- Inversion after *so, neither* and *nor*  
These are used in 'echoing' statements, agreeing or disagreeing.  
A: *I am going home.* B: *So am I.*  
A: *I don't like meat.* B: *Neither do I.*  
See Grammar 12 for ways of giving emphasis without inverting after *so*.



## 1 Correct any sentences which are inappropriate in the contexts given.



- 1 Guest to host: 'So nice was that pudding, that I would like to have some more.'  
..... That pudding was so nice that .....
- 2 Witness to court: 'No sooner had I turned out the light, than I heard a noise outside.'  
.....
- 3 News reader: 'Such was the force of the earthquake, that whole villages have been devastated.'  
.....
- 4 Parent to child: 'Should you fancy a pizza, let's order one now.'  
..... If you like/fancy a pizza .....
- 5 Friend to friend: 'Never before have I seen this film.'  
..... I have never seen .....
- 6 Politician to audience: 'Seldom has the country faced a greater threat.'  
.....
- 7 Celebrity to interviewer: 'Were I to have the time, I'd go climbing more often.'  
..... If I had the time .....
- 8 Victim to police officer: 'Scarcely had we been introduced when he punched me for no reason.'  
.....
- 9 Printed notice: 'Under no circumstances is this control panel to be left unattended.'  
.....
- 10 Colleague to colleague: 'Should you change your mind, just let me know.'  
.....

## 2 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given.

- 1 It was only when the office phoned me that I found out about the meeting.  
find  
Not until ..... the office phoned me did I find out ..... about the meeting.
- 2 The facts were not all made public at the time.  
later  
Only ..... later the facts were ..... all made public.
- 3 The response to our appeal was so great that we had to take on more staff.  
response  
Such ..... was the response ..... to our appeal that we had to take on more staff.
- 4 Harry broke his leg, and also injured his shoulder.  
but did Harry break his leg  
Not only ..... he broke ..... but he ..... also injured his shoulder.
- 5 The police didn't suspect at all that the judge was the murderer.  
did  
Little ..... did the police suspect the judge ..... as being the murderer.
- 6 The bus driver cannot be blamed for the accident in any way.  
held  
In ..... no way is the driver to be held ..... responsible for the accident.
- 7 If the government increased taxes, they would lose the election.  
raise  
Were ..... the government to raise ..... taxes, they would lose the election.
- 8 As soon as I got home, I realized I'd left my bag in the shop.  
had  
No sooner ..... had I gotten home than ..... I realized I'd left my bag in the shop.
- 9 It was only when I asked a passer-by that I realized where I was.  
did  
Not until ..... I asked a passer-by did I realize ..... where I was.
- 10 The minister was interrupted just after starting his speech.  
when  
Hardly ..... had the minister started his speech, when ..... he was interrupted.



3 Complete each sentence with a phrase from the box.

Rarely have No sooner had Under no circumstances are Were you Rarely have  
Hardly had Not only did Under no circumstances will as do Little did

- 1 Hardly had we arrived at the hotel, when there was a power cut.
- 2 Under no circumstances are members of staff to accept gratuities from clients.
- 3 Little did Detective Dawson realize what she was to discover!
- 4 Were you to pay the full amount now, there would be a ten per cent discount.
- 5 I suppose, as do most people, that I will be retiring at 65.
- 6 Rarely have the doctors seen a more difficult case.
- 7 Not only did Jean win first prize, but she was also offered a promotion.
- 8 Under no circumstances will late arrivals be admitted to the theatre before the interval.
- 9 No sooner had one missing child been found, than another three disappeared.
- 10 Rarely have so many employees taken sick leave at the same time.

4 Complete each sentence with a phrase containing a suitable form of the verb in brackets.

- 1 Should (need) you need anything, could you let me know?
- 2 Were the plane (take off) to have taken off, everyone in it would have been killed.
- 3 Had (study) I studied harder, I would probably have passed all my exams.
- 4 Should (be) you be in the neighbourhood, drop in.
- 5 Had (go) you gone to the doctor immediately, your daughter would not be so ill.
- 6 Never before (spend) has she spent so much money on her daughter's birthday.
- 7 Should (feel) you feel hungry, just call room service, and order a meal.
- 8 Were (offer) we to offer her the job, we couldn't be sure that she would accept.
- 9 Had (take) we taken the necessary measures, this political crisis could have been avoided.
- 10 Scarcely (get) had I got home when the police called us with news of Geoffrey.

5 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.

- 1 Jim promised that he would never/never would he tell anyone else.
- 2 Not until it was too late I remembered/did I remember to call Susan.
- 3 Hardly had we settled down in our seats than/when the lights went out.
- 4 Only after checking three times I was/was I certain of the answer.
- 5 At no time I was aware/was I aware of anything out of the ordinary.
- 6 Only Catherine and Sally passed/did they pass the final examination.
- 7 Only when Pete has arrived/has Pete arrived can we begin the programme.
- 8 No sooner had it stopped raining than/when the sun came out.

6 Complete the text by writing a word or phrase from the box in each space.

little	such	not only	seldom	under no circumstances
along	as	no sooner	scarcely	had

Well, ladies and gentlemen, we've done it again – another election victory. The last four years of office have been a wonderful time for the party, a tale of adversity overcome. (1) No sooner had we come to office than the Stock Market crashed. But we survived that scare, and we came out of it stronger for the experience. The opposition claimed we were faltering. (2) Little did I hear such hypocrisy from a party which continued to squabble internally for the next four years. Then (3) as came a fellow called David Rew, with his new breakaway Democratic party – but he didn't have much success in the opinion polls! (4) Not only did he claim he'd become Prime Minister within three years, he also reckoned that this party was now unpopular with younger voters. (5) Scarcely did he realize that it would be the young voters who gave us an overwhelming vote of confidence in yesterday's election. (6) Under no circumstances had the first votes rolled in when it was obvious that we would be re-elected with a huge majority. (7) Not only was the extent of our victory that the New Democrats obtained a meagre five seats. (8) Not only they know they would perform so poorly, I don't think they would have been quite so scathing in their criticism of our economic policy. But rest assured, ladies and gentlemen, (9) as will we rest on our laurels. There is no room for complacency in this government. And I am confident, (10) as I'm sure are most of you, that the next four years will be a resounding success. Thank you.