

Inversion

Inversion Definition

Inversion, also known as “anastrophe,” is a literary technique in which the normal order of words is reversed, in order to achieve a particular effect of emphasis or [meter](#).

Inversion Techniques

Inversion is achieved by doing the following:

Placing an adjective after the noun it qualifies, g. the soldier *strong*

Placing a verb before its subject g. *shouts* the policeman

Placing a noun before its preposition g. *worlds* between

In the English language, there are inversions that are part of its grammar structure, and are quite common in their use. For instance, inversion always occurs in interrogative statements where verbs, or auxiliaries, or helping verbs are placed before their subjects. Similarly, inversion happens in typical exclamatory sentences where objects are placed before their verbs and subjects, and preceded by a wh- word, such as the following examples of inversion:

What a beautiful picture it is!

Where in the world were you!

How wonderful the weather is today!

Examples of Inversion in Literature

Apart from the above-mentioned common inversions, some unusual inversions are employed in literature by writers, in order to achieve some special artistic effects.

Example #1: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

It was a common practice in the days of William Shakespeare to use inversions. Look at an example of inversion from *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 1, Scene 5:

“Her mother is the lady of the house,
And a good lady, and wise and virtuous.
I nursed her daughter that you talked withal.
I tell you, he that can lay hold of her,
Shall have the chinks.”

Example #2: *Macbeth* (By William Shakespeare)

Here is another example of inversion from Shakespeare’s Play *Macbeth*:

MACBETH: “If’t be so, For Banquo’s issue have I fil’d my mind,
For them the gracious Duncan have I murther’d,
Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings –the seed of Banquo kings!
Rather than so, come, Fate, into the list,
And champion me to the utterance!”

The inversions in the above lines serve to highlight the [conflict](#) in Macbeth’s mind after he had killed Duncan. The conflict was leading him to insanity gradually.

Example #3: *Kubla Khan* (By Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

Inversion examples are more common in poetry than in [prose](#). Inversion creates meter and [rhyme](#) in the lines. Coleridge uses inversion artistically in his renowned poem *Kubla Khan*:

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.”

The inversions enhance the artistic effect of the poem.

Example #4: *Huckleberry Finn* (By Mark Twain)

Read the following lines from William Wordsworth’s poem *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*:

“To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong:
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep...”

Example #5: *Adonais* (By Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Shelly describes his favorite literary and political personality, Milton, in the following lines:

“Blind, old, and lonely, when his country’s pride,
The priest, the slave, and the liberticide,
Trampled and mocked with many a loathed rite...”

The inverted [syntax](#) in the above lines aids the poet to lay an emphasis, and highlight the distinctive qualities of John Milton even more.

Example #6: *Love in Jeopardy* (By Humbert Wolfe)

Similarly, in the poem *Love in Jeopardy*, by Humbert Wolfe, there is an inversion of an unusual kind. He wrote:

“Here by the rose-tree
they planted once
of Love in Jeopardy
an Italian bronze.”

Here, the poet attempts to produce an ancient effect, as he is describing an old statue in the poem.

Function of Inversion

Like all [literary devices](#), the main function of inversion in prose or poetry is to help writers achieve stylistic effect, like laying an emphasis on a particular point, or changing the focus of the readers from a particular point. In poetry, inversions are regularly used to create [rhythm](#), meter, or rhyming scheme in the lines.