

Inversion

What for?

- ↳ for emphasis,
- ↳ dramatic purpose,
- ↳ or formality.

It makes our sentence sound surprising or striking (*llamativo*) or unusual. It also sounds quite formal.

When?

In written English, as well as in a very formal style, inversion can be used in the following cases:

• After negative adverbial expressions:

- Under no circumstances *can we accept* credit cards.
- In no way *can he be* held responsible.
- At no time *did she say* she would come.
- At no point *was the price mentioned*.
- Not until I heard my name *did I believe* I had won the race.

• After adverbial expressions of place:

- Round the corner *came the postman*.
- On the doorstep *was a bunch of flowers*.
- In the hall *stood a policeman*.

- **Seldom:** raramente, casi nunca
- **Rarely:** /'rɛərli/ = seldom
- **Barely:** /'bɛərli/ apenas
'He can barely read'.
- **Scarcely:** /'skɛərslɪ/ 'I scarcely have enough money to live'.
- **Hardly:** apenas

• After 'seldom', 'rarely', 'never', and 'little':

- *Seldom have I seen* such a beautiful view.
- *Rarely did he pay* anyone a compliment.
- *Never had I felt* so happy.
- *Little did he imagine* how dangerous it would be.

• After 'hardly', 'scarcely', 'barely', 'no sooner', when one thing happens after another.

- *Hardly had I begun* to speak *when* I was interrupted.
- *Scarcely had we started* our meal *when* the phone rang.
- *Barely had they finished* the match *when* the rain started to fall.
- *No sooner had I arrived* **than** they all started to argue.

- Note that hardly, scarcely and barely are followed by **when**.
- No sooner is followed by **than**.

• After adverbial expressions beginning with 'only' and 'not only' :

- *Only after the meeting did I realize* the importance of the subject.
- *Only when the plane landed safely did he calm down*.
- *Not only was the car slow*, it was also very uncomfortable.

• Conditionals with 'HAD' 'WERE' and 'SHOULD'

In conditional sentences we can sometimes replace the 'if' with an inversion:

- *If I had known* it would be so difficult I would never have enrolled.
With inversion: *Had I known* it would be so difficult, I would never have enrolled.
- *If we had known* she was alone, we could have called her.
With inversion: *Had we known* she was alone, we would have called her.

• After exclamations with 'here' and 'there' :

- *Here comes* the winner!
- *There goes* all our money!

• With verbs of reporting such as 'say' or 'ask' in direct speech:

- *"I love you"* said Harry.
- *"How far is it?"* asked the passenger.

• After 'so/such' ...'that': (formal)

- 'So + adjective + verb ... 'that'
 - *So expensive was the journey that* they had to borrow money.
 - *So strange were* my surroundings *that* I couldn't sleep.
 - *So exhausted was* the hiker *that* he went straight to bed.
- 'Such' + verb + noun ... 'that'
 - *Such was* the wind *that* we couldn't open the door.
 - *Such was* their excitement *that* the children couldn't stay quiet.
 - *Such was* her fear *that* she couldn't utter a word.

Hardly	<i>Hardly had I got into bed when the telephone rang.</i>
Never	<i>Never had she seen such a beautiful sight before.</i>
Seldom	<i>Seldom do we see such an amazing display of dance.</i>
Rarely	<i>Rarely will you hear such beautiful music.</i>
Only then	<i>Only then did I understand why the tragedy had happened.</i>
Not only ... but	<i>Not only does he love chocolate and sweets, but he also smokes.</i>
No sooner	<i>No sooner had we arrived home than the police rang the doorbell.</i>
Scarcely	<i>Scarcely had I got off the bus when it crashed into the back of a car.</i>
Only later	<i>Only later did she really think about the situation.</i>
Nowhere	<i>Nowhere have I ever had such bad service.</i>
Little	<i>Little did he know!</i>
Only in this way	<i>Only in this way could John earn enough money to survive.</i>
In no way	<i>In no way do I agree with what you're saying.</i>
On no account	<i>On no account should you do anything without asking me first.</i>



In the following expressions, the inversion comes in the second part of the sentence:

Not until	<i>Not until I saw John with my own eyes did I really believe he was safe.</i>
Not since	<i>Not since Lucy left college had she had such a wonderful time.</i>
Only after	<i>Only after I'd seen her flat, did I understand why she wanted to live there.</i>
Only when	<i>Only when we had all arrived home, did I feel calm.</i>
Only by	<i>Only by working extremely hard could we afford to eat.</i>

PRACTICE

Exercise #1: Change the normal sentence into one with inversion. For example:

"*We had hardly arrived when Julie burst into the house*" → "**Hardly had we arrived when Julie burst into the house**".

1. John had never been to such a fantastic restaurant.
2. I in no way want to be associated with this project.
3. They had no sooner eaten dinner than the ceiling crashed onto the dining table.
4. I had scarcely finished writing my essay when the examiner announced the end of the exam.
5. I seldom leave my house so early.
6. People rarely appreciate this musician's talent.
7. We would understand what had happened that night only later.
8. He understood little about the situation.
9. The children should on no account go on their own.
10. I have never before been asked to accept a bribe.
11. He had hardly left the house when the storm broke.
12. He had just left the house when the storm broke.
No sooner...
13. He was able to make himself heard only by shouting loudly.
14. They not only rob you, they smash everything.
15. She not only shouted at Peter, she also hit him.
16. He had no money and didn't know anyone in the city.
17. This switch must not be touched on any account.
18. He had just put down the receiver when the telephone rang again.
19. He had no money and didn't know anyone he could borrow from
He had no money, nor...
20. If they were my children, I wouldn't let them out.
21. If you should need my help again, just give me a ring.
22. The food was so delicious that we ate every last bite.
23. She was so exhausted that she went straight to bed.
24. He played the tune so badly that nobody recognised it.
25. The extent of the damage was such that the car was a total write-off.

*write-off: siniestro total

Exercise #1: Change the normal sentence into one with inversion.

For example: "We had hardly arrived when Julie burst into the house" becomes "Hardly had we arrived when Julie burst into the house".

1. John had never been to such a fantastic restaurant.
Never had John been to such a fantastic restaurant.
2. I in no way want to be associated with this project.
In no way do I want to be associated with this project.
3. They had no sooner eaten dinner than the ceiling crashed onto the dining table.
No sooner had they eaten dinner than the ceiling crashed onto the dining table.
4. I had scarcely finished writing my essay when the examiner announced the end of the exam.
Scarcely had I finished writing my essay when the examiner announced the end of the exam.
5. I seldom leave my house so early.
Seldom do I leave my house so early.
6. People rarely appreciate this musician's talent.
Rarely do people appreciate this musician's talent.
7. We would understand what had happened that night only later.
Only later would we understand what had happened that night.
8. He understood little about the situation.
Little did he understand about the situation.
9. The children should on no account go on their own.
On no account should the children go on their own.
10. I have never before been asked to accept a bribe.
Never before have I been asked to accept a bribe. **bribe: soborno*
11. He had hardly left the house when the storm broke.
Hardly had he left the house when the storm broke.
12. He had just left the house when the storm broke.
No sooner had he left the house when/than the storm broke.
13. He was able to make himself heard only by shouting loudly.
Only by shouting loudly was he able to make himself heard.
14. They not only rob you, they smash everything
Not only do they rob you, they smash everything
15. She not only shouted at Peter, she also hit him.
Not only did she shout at Peter, but she also hit him.
16. He had no money and didn't know anyone in the city.
He had no money, nor did he know anyone in the city
17. This switch must not be touched on any account.
On no account must this switch be touched.
18. He had just put down the receiver when the telephone rang again.
No sooner had he put down the receiver when / than the telephone rang again.
19. He had no money and didn't know anyone he could borrow it from.
He had no money, nor did he know anyone he could borrow it from.
20. If they were my children, I wouldn't let them out.
Were they my children, I wouldn't let them out.
21. If you should need my help again, just give me a ring.
Should you need my help again, just give me a ring.
22. The food was so delicious that we ate every last bite
So delicious was the food that we ate every last bite.
23. She was so exhausted that she went straight to bed.
So exhausted was she that she went straight to bed.
24. He played the tune so badly that nobody recognised it.
So badly did he play the tune that nobody recognised it. /'rekognaɪz/
25. The extent of the damage was such that the car was a total write-off.
Such was the extent /ɪk'stent/ of the damage /'dæmɪdʒ/ that the car was a total write-off. **write-off: siniestro total*