

Intermediate English Grammar

Chapter 12 **Inversion (part 2)**

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Inversion

Inversion happens when we reverse the normal word order of a structure, most commonly the subject-verb word order.

Reversing the normal order of words, or **inversion**, can be used for emphasis or a sense of drama. It is common after certain types of adverbials.

Inversion after negative adverbials

In this simple sentence, the subject comes before the verb.

She is a famous singer. She is also a very good actor.

Not only is she a famous singer, **but** she's **also** a very good actor.

After the negative adverbial, the subject and the verb swap places.

"But" is optional.

Inversion after negative adverbials

In formal and literary language in particular, we use negative adverbials at the beginning of a clause. The subject and first auxiliary are inverted, and **do** is used with a simple tense verb after-

→The time adverbials **never (before), rarely, seldom, barely/ hardly / scarcely .. when / before; no sooner ... than:**

- **Seldom do we have** goods returned to us because they are faulty.
- **Hardly had everybody taken** their seats when Dr Lee began her lecture.

Inversion after negative adverbials

→ **only + at time expression**, as in **only after, only later, only if, only once, only then, only when**:

- She bought a newspaper and some milk at the shop on the corner. **Only later did *she* realise** that she'd been given the wrong change.
- **Only when she apologises will / speak** to her again.

Inversion after negative adverbials

→ **only** + other prepositional phrases beginning **only by** ..., **only in** ..., **only with** ..., etc.:

- **Only by chance had *Carl* discovered** where the birds were nesting.
- Maria had to work in the evenings. **Only in this way was *she* able to complete** the report.

Inversion after negative adverbials

→ expressions such as **at no time, in no way, on no account, under / in no circumstance:**

- **At no time did *they* actually break** the rules of the game.
- **Under no circumstances are *passengers* permitted** to open the doors themselves.

→ expressions with **not ...**, such as **not only, not until, not since, not for one moment** and also **not a + noun:**

- **Not until August did *the government* order** an inquiry into the accident.
- **Not a word had *she* written** since the exam had started.

Inversion after negative adverbials

→ **little** with negative meaning:

- **Little do *they* know** how lucky they are to live in such a wonderful house. (= 'they don't know' or 'they don't know sufficiently')

Note that inversion can occur after a clause beginning **only after / if / when** or **not until**:

- **Only when the famine gets worse will *world governments* begin** to act.
- **Not until the train pulled into the station did *Miguel* find** that his coat had gone.

Further Examples

The auxiliary and subject
swap places.

Not since my childhood **have I** enjoyed a performance so much.

Not until the performance was over **did he** look up at the audience.

Where there is no auxiliary
verb, "do" is used.

Only if it stops raining **will the race** go ahead this afternoon.

Only when he emerged from the car **did the fans** start cheering.

Only after the race **did he** realize what he had achieved.

Little did they they know how lucky they are to be successful.

Little did they realize how difficult fame would be.

INVERSION AFTER TIME ADVERBIALS

Inversion can be used after time adverbials that are negative or restrictive, such as “no sooner” and “never before.” This emphasizes the time at which something happens, or happened.

In this simple sentence, the subject comes before the verb.

Tina had just released an album when she starred in her first movie.

The subject (“Tina”) and the auxiliary verb (“had”) swap places.

No sooner had Tina released an album **than** she starred in her first movie.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

Hardly had she stepped out of the car
when fans surrounded her.



Rarely do you meet a celebrity
with such talent and style.



Never before had a song reached
the top of the charts so quickly.



Only sometimes does it not
snow during the ski season.



Exercise

Rewrite the sentences with a similar meaning beginning with a word/phrase from the box.

only if

barely

only with

rarely

at no time

little

1. A new film has not often before produced such positive reviews.
2. The public was never in any danger.
3. He only felt entirely relaxed with close friends and family.
4. The match won't be cancelled unless the pitch is frozen.
5. I didn't know then that Carmen and I would be married one day.
6. He had only just entered the water when it became clear he couldn't swim.

Exercise [answer]

Rewrite the sentences with a similar meaning beginning with a word/phrase from the box.

only if

barely

only with

rarely

at no time

little

1. Rarely has a new film produced such positive reviews.
2. At no time was the public (ever) in any danger.
3. Only with close friends and family did he feel entirely relaxed.
4. Only if the pitch is frozen will the match be cancelled.
5. Little did I know then that Carmen and I would be married one day.
6. Barely had he entered the water when it became clear he couldn't swim.

Exercise

Now do the same using these words and phrases.

only once

only in

on no account

hardly

not only

not for one moment

1. You must not light the fire if you are alone in the house.
2. There was never any rivalry between the three brothers.
3. I wasn't only wet through, I was freezing cold.
4. I had only ever climbed this high once before.
5. The audience had only just taken their seats when the conductor stepped onto the stage.
6. He has only been acknowledged to be a great author in the last few years.

Exercise [answer]

Now do the same using these words and phrases.

only once

only in

on no account

hardly

not only

not for one moment

1. On no account are you to light the fire if you are alone in the house. /
On no account should / must you ...
2. Not for one moment was there any rivalry between the three brothers.
3. Not only was I wet through, I was freezing cold.
4. Only once had I ever climbed this high before. / Only once before had I ever
climbed this high.
5. Hardly had the audience taken their seats when the conductor stepped onto the
stage.
6. Only in the last few years has he been acknowledged to be a great author.

Inversion after so + adjective ... that; such + be ... that; neither ... / nor ...

We can use **so + adjective** at the beginning of a clause to emphasise the adjective. When we do this, the subject and first auxiliary are inverted, and **do** is used with a simple tense verb:

- **So successful** *was* **her business**, that Lana was able to retire at the age of 50.
- **So dangerous** *did* **weather conditions** *become*, that all mountain roads were closed.

Inversion after **so + adjective ... that;** **such + be ... that; neither ... / nor ...**

We can use **such + be** at the beginning of a clause to emphasise the extent or degree of something.

- **Such is the popularity** of the play that the theatre is likely to be full every night.

We use inversion after **neither** and **nor** when these words begin a clause to introduce a negative addition to a previous negative clause or sentence:

- For some time after the explosion Jack couldn't hear, and **neither could he** see.
- The council never wanted the new supermarket to be build, **nor did local residents**.

Exercise

Correct any mistakes in this news article.

TOWN EVACUATED AS FOREST FIRES APPROACH

The people of Sawston were evacuated yesterday as forest fire headed towards the town. Such the heat was of oncoming inferno that trees more than 100 meters ahead began to smoulder. Only once in recent years, during 2004, a town of this size has had to be evacuated because of forest fires. A fleet of coaches and lorries arrived in the town in the early morning. Into these vehicles the sick and elderly climbed, before they headed off to safety across the river. Residents with cars left by mid morning, as all non-essential police officers did.

Hardly the evacuation had been completed when the wind changed direction and it became clear that the fire would leave Sawston untouched. Soon after that were heard complaints from some residents. 'At no time the fires posed a real threat.' said one local man. 'I didn't want to leave my home, and nor most of my neighbours did.' So upset some elderly residents are that they are threatening to complain to their MP. But Chief Fire Officer Jones replied, 'Hadn't we taken this action, lives would have been put at risk. Only when the fires have moved well away from the town residents will be allowed to return to their homes.'

Exercise [answer]

Correct any mistakes in this news article.

TOWN EVACUATED AS FOREST FIRES APPROACH

The people of Sawston were evacuated yesterday as forest fire headed towards the town. Such was the heat of oncoming inferno that trees more than 100 meters ahead began to smoulder. Only once in recent years, during 2004, has a town of this size (*inversion is likely in this written context*) had to be evacuated because of forest fires. A fleet of coaches and lorries arrived in the town in the early morning. Into these vehicles climbed the sick and elderly (*inversion is likely in this written context*), before they headed off to safety across the river. Residents with cars left by mid morning, as did all non-essential police officers.

Hardly had the evacuation been completed when the wind changed direction and it became clear that the fire would leave Sawston untouched. Soon after that complaints were heard from some residents. 'At no time did the fires pose a real threat.' said one local man. 'I didn't want to leave my home, and nor did most of my neighbours.' So upset are some elderly residents that they are threatening to complain to their MP. But Chief Fire Officer Jones replied, 'Had we not taken this action, lives would have been put at risk. Only when the fires have moved well away from the town will residents be allowed to return to their homes.'

Thank you!

REFERENCES

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