

## SECTION 2

### Inversion after negative adverbs

(For inversion in conditionals after *should*, *had*, etc. see Unit 5, Sections 3.4 and 4. For inversion in result clauses after *such*, *so*, see Unit 6, Section 2.1)

#### 1 WHAT IS INVERSION?

When we begin a sentence with a negative adverb or adverbial phrase, we sometimes have to change the usual word order of subject and verb (often using an auxiliary verb such as *do*):

*I had **never** seen so many people in one room.*

(= normal word order)

***Never** had I seen so many people in one room.*

(= inversion)

~~***Not only** he was good looking, he was also very intelligent.*~~

***Not only** was he good looking, he was also very intelligent.*

#### 2 WHEN WE USE INVERSION

We use inversion when we move a negative adverb (*never*, *nowhere*, *not only*, etc.) to the beginning of a sentence. We do this because we want to emphasise the meaning of the adverb.

##### Time relationships

- We use inversion after 'negative' adverbs which emphasise a time relationship at the beginning of a sentence:

***No sooner** had I put the phone down **than** it rang again.*

***Hardly / Scarcely / Barely** had I got my breath back **when** it was time to go again.*

- We use inversion with phrases that use *not*:  
***Not until** he apologises will I speak to him again.*  
***Not since** I was little have I had so much fun.*  
***Not for one minute** do I imagine they'll come back.*
- We use inversion with some time phrases that use *only*:  
***Only after** several weeks did she begin to recover.*  
***Only later** did she realise what had happened.*  
***Only then** did he remember he hadn't got his keys.*  
***Only when** I've finished this will I be able to think about anything else.*

Here are more examples:

***only recently**    **only in the last few days**  
**only last week**    **only five minutes earlier***

### watch out!

After *not until*, *only when* and *only after*, the inversion is in the main part of the sentence:

~~***Not until** did I see him I remembered we had met before.*~~

***Not until** I saw him **did** I remember we had met before.*

#### Frequency

We also use inversion after 'negative' adverbs which emphasise frequency at the beginning of a sentence:

***Never** have I been so taken aback. **Rarely** do they fail to get away for a holiday. **Seldom** is that pop group out of the news. **Hardly ever** did he wear a suit.*

- We can also use inversion after 'negative' adverbs at the beginning of a sentence to emphasise how infrequently things happen:  
***Little** did she realise what was about to happen.*  
***Nowhere** was a replacement to be found.*

#### General emphasis

We often use inversion for general emphasis with phrases that use *only*:

***Only by** patience and hard work will we find a solution.*

***Only in this way** do we stand any chance of success.*

- and we can also use phrases with *no*:  
***In no way** should this be regarded as an end of the matter.*  
***On no account** are you to repeat this to anyone.*  
***Under no circumstances** can we accept the offer.*

#### 3 NOT USING INVERSION

We use inversion when the adverb modifies the verb, and not when it modifies the noun:

***Rarely** seen during the day, the badger is a famously shy animal. (= no inversion)*

***Hardly** anyone knows about it. (= no inversion)*

### ? check

Tick (✓) the sentences which do not contain inversion.

- Nowhere have I seen anything like this.
- Never give up until you have tried all the alternatives.
- Only by paying the fees in full can we guarantee a place on the course.
- Hardly anyone applied for the job.
- Not since the 1940s has there been such poverty.