



INVERSION WITH NEGATIVE ADVERBIALS: ADDING EMPHASIS

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Inversion with negative adverbials: Adding emphasis

Exercise 1

Choose the correct option to complete the sentences below.

1 He can speak French but it in public, and almost never when on diplomatic duty.

2 those words all the newspapers published them.

3 the stress she was under.

4 the world gets rid of all nuclear weapons truly safe.

5 such dedicated and honest leaders.



7 the votes been counted they started breaking promises.

8 we are able to reinvent ourselves to succeed in business and life.

9 ever said anything to damage his reputation.

10 the South Americans lose their ice-cold concentration, and fail to control the ball.

Check Answers

Exercises: 1

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What is an inversion with a negative adverbial?

In formal English, we can use a **negative or restrictive adverb** at the beginning of a sentence to make it more emphatic or dramatic. When we do this, the adverb is then followed by an inversion: **auxiliary verb + subject (+ verb)**. See the example below:

▸ *I could find my keys **nowhere**. ⇒ **Nowhere could I find** my keys.*



- *I understand the true meaning **only now**. ⇒ **Only now do I understand** the true meaning.*
- *I didn't say anything **until she arrived**. ⇒ **Not until she arrived did I say** anything.*

Common adverbs used with this structure

In the table below, you can see some of the most common negative or restrictive adverbials that are sometimes used at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis.



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i = INVERSION: AUXILIARY VERB + SUBJECT (+ VERB)

HARDLY, BARELY, SCARCELY, NO SOONER

Hardly i when

Hardly had we arrived home when we heard the news.

Barely i when

Barely had I opened the book when Mark put on the music.

Scarcely i when

Scarcely had we finished talking when he made the call.

No sooner i than

No sooner had the shop opened its doors than it went bankrupt.

ONLY

Only if + clause i

Only if we invest more money can we save the company.

Only when + clause i

Only when I sleep can I forget about the incident.

Only now i

Only now can I understand what really happened.

Only + any element i

Only chicken did they serve for dinner.
Only Mark could we trust.

NOT

Not only i but also

Not only will you get a good result, but you will also be the best.

Not once i

Not once did she look at me at the party.

Not since + clause i

Not since I was a child have I had such a great time.

Not + any element i

Not in a million years will I go back there.
Not until I see her again will I be happy.

NO

Under no circumstances i

Under no circumstances should we allow this to happen.

In no way i

In no way am I related to this man.

Nowhere i

Nowhere were the people more excited than in that stadium.

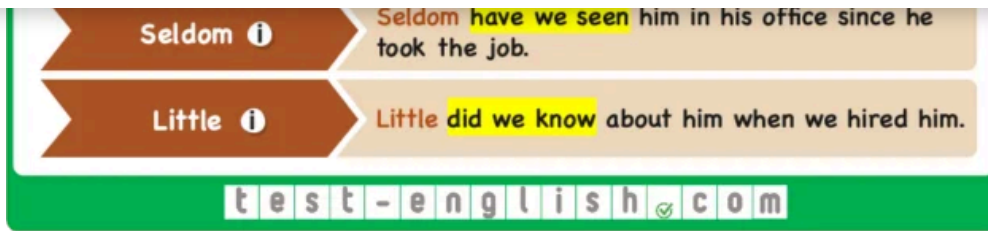
No way i (informal)

No way are we going to pay for that.

NEVER, RARELY, SELDOM, LITTLE

Never i

Never (before) have I met such a stupid man.
Never (before) had she felt so happy.



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Hardly, barely, scarcely, no sooner

We normally use **hardly ... when**, **barely ... when**, **scarcely ... when**, and **no sooner ... than** in narratives with past perfect in the inversion.

We use **no sooner ... than** (NOT **that**, or **when**)

Adverbial + clause + inversion

! **Note** that after some adverbials, such as **only if** and **only when** we use a subordinate clause (subject + verb), and that the inversion is never in the subordinate clause but in the main verb of the sentence. Check the sentence below:

- **Only when do I sleep I can forget** about the accident. ✗
- **Only when I sleep can I forget** about the accident. ✓

The same happens with other adverbials, such as **not since** and **not until**; we use a subordinate clause (subject + verb), and the inversion is never in the subordinate clause but in the sentence's main verb. Check the sentence below:

- **Not since was I a child I have had** such a great time. ✗
- **Not since I was a child have I had** such a great time. ✓

If you are in doubt, it's always useful to look at the sentence without the negative adverbial at the beginning.

- **I can forget** about the accident only when I sleep.



The main subject and verb are at the beginning of the sentence, and this is the element that must be in the inversion.

Not

We must always use **not** followed by another element before the inversion.

- **Not can we see** such great expressions of art **often**. ❌
- **Not often can we see** such great expressions of art. ✅

Adverbs of frequency

We can also use inversion after the negative or restrictive adverbs of frequency, such as **seldom**, **rarely**, or **never**.

We often use **never** to talk about experiences. In that case, we normally use present perfect or past perfect.

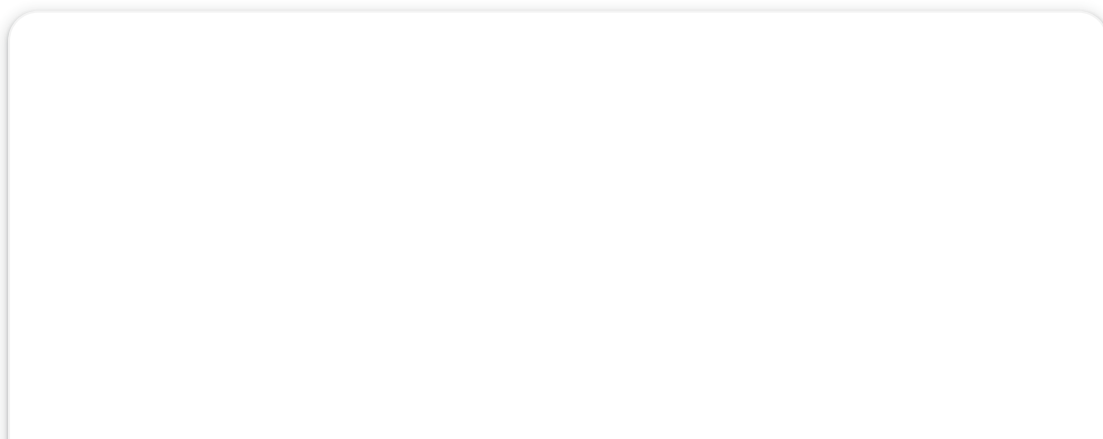
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Position of adverbs and adverb phrases

It was you
who stole
my toys!



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Cleft sentences: Adding emphasis



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