Inversion

Grammar explanation

'Inversion' means reversing (inverting) the normal subject–verb word order in a sentence.

We can use inversion to add emphasis, especially in formal English. It is common, for example, in political speeches, because it has a persuasive and impressive effect.

To invert a sentence in this way, we put the adverbial (e.g. *never*, *rarely*, *not only*, etc.) at the beginning and change the normal position of the subject and the auxiliary verb.

*Not only did they arrive late but they talked throughout the film.   
(They not only arrived late but they talked throughout the film.)*

If there is no auxiliary verb, we need to add one. For example, we add *do* for present simple verbs and *did* for past simple verbs.

*Rarely do we find such talent.   
(We rarely find such talent.)*

*Never*, *rarely*, *seldom*

These adverbials are often used with present perfect, past perfect or modals like *can* and *could*.

*Never had they seen so many people in the village.  
Seldom has she taken a day off work.  
Rarely can a patient fully recover from such an injury.*

*Hardly*, *barely*, *scarcely*, *no sooner*

These adverbials often refer to an event which quickly follows another in the past and are usually used with past perfect. *Hardly*, *scarcely* and *barely* are followed by *when* in the contrasting clause, and *no sooner* is followed by *than*.

*Hardly had we sat down when we were told to evacuate the building.  
Scarcely had the votes been counted when the new president was pushed in front of TV cameras.  
No sooner had the game started than the captain was taken ill.  
No sooner was the new park open than it started raining.*

*Only* + time expression

These include *only after*, *only if/when*,*only then* and*only later*.

*Only when they refilled my glass did I realise it was broken.  
Only later did they discover they hadn't been told the truth.*

Phrases with *no* and *not*

These include *under no circumstances*, *on no account*, *at no time*,*in no way*, *on no condition*, *not until* and *not only*.

*Under no circumstances should children travel without an adult.  
In no way did we agree to this.*

*Little*

In these sentences, *little* has a negative or restrictive meaning.

*Little do people realise how hard it is to be a chef.  
(People don't realise how hard it is to be a chef.)  
Little did she know then that she would become the company director.    
(She didn't know then that she would become the company director.)*

Do this exercise to test your grammar again.

[**Grammar test 2**](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/grammar/c1-grammar/inversion-after-negative-adverbials)