

Negative Inversion

The general rule for word order in English (subject-verb-object) can be broken by placing certain adverbial words or phrases, at the beginning of a sentence: this is done to produce a more dramatic effect, particularly in story-telling, stating strong opinions and the giving of rules.

Look at the following examples:

“Normal”	Dramatic Inversion
<p>a) The result was never in doubt. b) I have never heard such a terrible lecture. c) You can't see such large forests anywhere else. d) He didn't realise the extent of the damage until he saw it in daylight. e) I can only relax after I have had a drink. f) I was not only tired, I was also hungry. g) Almost as soon as I got into the house the telephone rang. h) The sun rose and almost immediately rain. i) A public figure has seldom been more completely humiliated. j) He little realised that she had heard every word. k) It was such a heavy vase that he dropped it. l) He spoke so quickly that nobody could understand. m) He must not leave the country on any account. n) I wouldn't go back to university under any circumstances. o) The club will only admit men under exceptional circumstances.</p>	<p>At no time was the result in doubt. Never have I heard such a terrible lecture. Nowhere else is it possible to see such large forests.</p> <p>*Not until he saw the damage in daylight did he realise how bad it was. *Only after I have had a drink can I relax. Not only was I tired, (but) I was also hungry. No sooner had I got into the house than the telephone rang. Hardly had the sun risen when/before it began to rain. Seldom has a public figure been more completely humiliated. Little did he realise that she had heard every word. Such was the weight of the vase that he dropped it. So quickly did he speak that nobody could understand. On no account must he leave the country.</p> <p>Under no circumstances would I go back to university. Only under exceptional circumstances will the club admit men.</p>

*Notice that only, not until and not even introduce adverbial clauses, and the inversion comes in the **second** part of the sentence.

Use of English

A. Work in pairs. Discuss the difference in emphasis between these sentences:

1. At no level of society do women have equal rights with men.
Women do not have equal rights with men at any level of society.
2. It occurred to me later that I had made a big mistake.
Not until then did it occur to me that I had made a big mistake.
3. Rarely have I felt so upset about being criticised.
I have rarely felt so upset about being criticised.
4. So lonely did he feel that he went round to see his ex-wife for a chat.
He felt so lonely that he went round to see his ex-wife for a chat.
5. Little did they know that the sheriff was about to draw his revolver.
They didn't know that the sheriff was about to draw his revolver.

B Fill the gaps in these sentences with suitable words:

1. Little _____ that she would win the competition.
2. Not only _____ the piano brilliantly but she _____ too.
3. Never in my life _____ so humiliated!
4. Nowhere in the entire town _____ able to find a room for the night.
5. No sooner _____ the bath than the phone _____
6. So difficult _____ the work that _____
7. Under no circumstances _____ the fire doors _____
8. Not until _____ finished _____ allowed to leave the room.
9. Only after _____ the police able to catch the thieves.
10. Not once during her entire _____ in trouble with the law.
11. Not only _____ rather naive but he also _____ very sensitive.
12. No sooner _____ our picnic than _____.

1. Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible in meaning to the sentence printed before it, and uses an inverted verb form. In this exercise, the words which need to be changed or omitted are in italics, and the verbs to be inverted are underlined to help you.

EXAMPLE:

You will *only* be allowed to leave *when* you have finished the job.

Not until *you have finished the job* will you be allowed to leave.

1. It *never seemed* likely that the disagreement would be settled.

At no _____

2. We were *not allowed* into the country *until* our visas had been double-checked.

Only _____

3. You are *not to visit* the old part of town on your own, *whatever happens*.

Under no _____

4. *This is the first time that* television has played such an important role in our lives.

Never _____

5. You do *not often* come across someone as well-informed as Charles Osborne.

Seldom _____

6. He would not have learned the news *if he hadn't been* listening to the radio.

Had _____

7. We had *just sat down* to eat *when* the telephone rang.

No sooner _____

8. I *refuse to work* for that company again.

Never _____

9. She didn't *really realise* what was about to happen.

Little _____

10. He *acts so well* that the audience hangs on his every word.

So _____

11. He *doesn't normally* do his fair share of the work.

Rarely _____

2. Using the beginnings provided, rewrite the sentences to make them more emphatic and more formal.

1. They will never admit their mistakes.

Never _____

2. If she had come, she wouldn't have learnt the truth.

Had _____

3. He didn't only sing in the choir, he played in the school band as well.

Not only _____

4. We can hardly ever listen to such powerful performances.

Seldom _____

5. Politicians hardly ever experience what war really feels like.

Rarely _____

6. I don't argue with people and I have never been in a real fight either.

I don't argue with people and neither _____

3. Complete the sentences using the beginnings and the cues provided.

1. People spend too much money nowadays.

Not only _____ (they buy things they don't really need/ go on expensive holidays)

2. British football fans are the most violent in Europe.

Seldom _____ (it is quiet after the match)

3. The sunset at the seaside is an extraordinary sight.

Rarely _____ (one see anything so beautiful)

4. The evacuation of the building was completed just in time.

No sooner ..(than) _____ (the last person had left/ the fire broke out)

5. The press conference generated enormous interest.

Never before _____ (there had been such a great turnout of reporters and journalists)

Teachers

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The general rule for word order in English (subject-verb-object) can be broken by placing certain adverbial words or phrases, at the beginning of a sentence: this is done to produce a more dramatic effect, particularly in story-telling, stating strong opinions and the giving of rules.

Look at the following examples:

<i>“Normal”</i>	<i>Dramatic Inversion</i>
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<p>*Notice that only, not until and not even introduce adverbial clauses, and the inversion comes in the second part of the sentence.</p>	

Use of English:

A. Work in pairs. Discuss the difference in emphasis between these sentences:

1. **At no level of society** do women have equal rights with men.
Women do not have equal rights with men at any level of society.
2. It occurred to me **later** that I had made a big mistake.
Not until then did it occur to me that I had made a big mistake.
3. **Rarely** have I felt so upset about being criticised.
I have rarely felt so upset about being criticised.
4. **So lonely** did he feel that he went round to see his ex-wife for a chat.
He felt so lonely that he went round to see his ex-wife for a chat.
5. **Little** did they know that the sheriff was about to draw his revolver.
They didn't know that the sheriff was about to draw his revolver.

B Fill the gaps in these sentences with suitable words:

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Finish each of the following sentences in such a way that it is as similar as possible in meaning to the sentence printed before it, and uses an inverted verb form. In this exercise, the words which need to be changed or omitted are in italics, and the verbs to be inverted are underlined to help you.

EXAMPLE:

You will only be allowed to leave *when* you have finished the job.

Not until *you have finished the job* will you be allowed to leave.

1. It never seemed likely that the disagreement would be settled.

At no *time/point did it seem likely that the disagreement would be settled*

2. We were not allowed into the country *until* our visas had been double-checked.

Only *after our visas had been doubled-checked were we allowed into the country.*

3. You are not to visit the old part of town on your own, *whatever happens*.

Under no *circumstances are you to visit the old part of the town*

4. *This is the first time that* television has played such an important role in our lives.

Never *before has TV played such an important ...*

5. You do not often come across someone as well-informed as Charles Osborne.

Seldom *do you come across someone as well informed as ...*

6. He would not have learned the news *if he hadn't been* listening to the radio.

Had *he not been listening to the radio, we wouldn't have learnt*

7. We had just sat down to eat *when* the telephone rang.

No sooner *had we sat down to eat than the telephone rang.*

8. I refuse to work for that company again.

Never *again will I work for that company*

9. She didn't really realise what was about to happen.

Little *did she realise what was about to happen*

10. He acts so well that the audience hangs on his every word.

So *well does he act that the audience hang on to ...*

11. He doesn't normally do his fair share of the work.

Rarely does he do his fair share of the work

PRACTICE

1. Using the beginnings provided, rewrite the sentences to make them more emphatic and more formal.

1. They **will never admit their mistakes.**

Never **will they admit their mistakes**

2. If she had come, she wouldn't have learnt the truth.

Had **she come, she would have learnt the truth.**

3. He didn't only sing in the choir, he played in the school band as well.

Not only **did he sing in the choir, but he played in the school band as well.**

4. We can hardly ever listen to such powerful performances.

Seldom **can we listen to such powerful performance.**

5 Politicians hardly ever experience what war really feels like.

Rarely **do politicians experience what war really feels like.**

6 I don't argue with people and I have never been in a real fight either.

I don't argue with people and neither **have I ever been in a real fight.**

1. Complete the sentences using the beginnings and the cues provided.

1. People spend too much money nowadays.

Not only do people buy things they don't really need but they go on expensive holidays (they buy things they don't really need/ go on expensive holidays)

2. British football fans are the most violent in Europe.

Seldom is it quiet after the match (it is quiet after the match)

3. The sunset at the seaside is an extraordinary sight.

Rarely does one see anything so beautiful (one see anything so beautiful)

4. The evacuation of the building was completed just in time.

No sooner ..(than) had the last person left than the fire broke out.

(the last person had left/ the fire broke out)

5. The press conference generated enormous interest.

Never before had there been such a great turnout of reporters and journalists.

(there had been such a great turnout of reporters and journalists)