

NEGATIVE INVERSION

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Sentences can be given emphasis by negative inversion, which can take place ...

- 1 after negative adverbials such as *never, nowhere, not for one minute, not since, not until, never again, rarely*. It is mainly used in written English but can also be used to emphasize points in more formal spoken English such as when making speeches.

Never had he eaten such a huge meal.

Nowhere will you come across a more hospitable nation.

Nothing do they appreciate more than a trip to the country.

Not until 1918 did British women get the vote.

Rarely do you meet a man of such integrity.

- 2 in certain established sentence patterns.

*Hardly had he begun to speak **when** the majority of the guests departed.*

*No sooner had we sat down to dinner **than** the doorbell rang.*

Little did anyone realize the seriousness of the situation.

- 3 after expressions with *only* and *no*.

Only when I myself became a parent did I realize the value of my parents' advice.

*Not only did she write short stories, **but** she was **also** a painter of talent.*

At no time was I ever informed.

In no way can this government deny its guilt.

On no account will I compromise my ideals.

Pattern 1 - Negative inversion with adverbs of frequency.

Never have I tasted such a delicious meal

Rarely can a young chef have had success so young.

Hardly ever has a competition been won so early on in the game.

Seldom has a simple omelette tasted better.

Practice 1 make a new sentence using negative inversion from each sentence below.

| | |
|----|--|
| 1. | I had never felt so insulted. |
| 2. | A young pianist will rarely have been given such an accolade . [accolade ['ækələɪd] похвала, хороший отзыв, одобрение] |
| 3. | A young writer's second novel has seldom been more eagerly awaited. |
| 4. | The premiere of a new work will hardly ever have been so warmly applauded. |

Note: this pattern with a perfect tense and *so / such* or a comparative is probably the most common pattern in British English. All the examples in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, for instance, follow this pattern.

But you can also sometimes see sentences beginning, for example, 'Seldom do ...' or 'Rarely will ...' (or vice versa) plus a normal verb phrase; Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary has this example: '*Seldom do we receive any apology when mistakes are made.*'

Pattern 2 - Negative inversion with adverbs of time meaning 'only just' or 'immediately after'.

No sooner had he finished dinner, than she walked through the door.

Scarcely had I got out of bed, when the doorbell rang.

Barely had she passed her degree, when she was offered a job.

Hardly had we landed, when all hell let loose.

Practice 2 Make one new sentence using negative inversion from each pair of sentences below, using the prompts given. Remember about tenses. Start with a capital letter and finish with a full stop, and add a comma after the first clause as in the examples above.

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | I left the house. It started to rain. (No sooner / than) |
| 2. | We got the new car home. It broke down. (Scarcely / when) |
| 3. | He started to speak. People started to boo him. (Barely / when) |
| 4. | She arrived. She was surrounded by admirers. (Hardly / when) |

Note: with *hardly*, *scarcely* and *barely*, we usually use *when*. We can also use 'before': *Hardly had we landed, before all hell let loose.*

But with *no sooner* ..., we always use *than*.

Pattern 3 - Inversion with Little ...

1. *Little* does he know what the boss has in store for him.

in store (for someone) – awaiting someone in the future (Typically: be ~; hold something ~; lie ~:.) None of us knows what lies in store for us tomorrow. Some good lies in store for me, I think.

in store (for somebody/something) - planned or likely to happen: We have a big surprise in store for you. She's got a difficult few months in store, with her husband's illness.

2. *Little* did she realise what a stupid remark she had made.

3. *Little* did we suspect that we would never see each other again.

In these constructions, **little** + **verb of cognition** such as *imagine*, *know*, *realise*, *suspect*, *understand*, (usually in Present Simple or Past Simple) means something like **have no idea**, as in:

1. *He has no idea (doesn't know) what the boss has in store for him.*

2. *She had no idea (didn't realise) what a stupid remark she had made.*

3. *We had no idea (didn't suspect) that we would never see each other again.*

We usually only use **little** with this meaning in the inverted form. We are unlikely to say, for example:

He little knows what the boss has in store for him.

Practice 3 Make new sentences starting with '**Little**' from the sentences below, using the same format as in the examples above. Start with a capital letter and finish with a full stop, but don't add any other punctuation.

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | He doesn't understand what he is up against. [up against (someone or something) - in opposition to someone or something, as in a contest. (Typically: be ~; come ~; go ~; run ~; team ~.) <i>Let's team up against Paul and Tony in the footrace. We came up against a very strong team.</i>] |
| 2. | They can't imagine what a hornet's nest they've stirred up. [hornet ['hɔ:nɪt] шершень; hornet's nest - осиное гнездо] |
| 3. | She didn't suspect that she was about to be made redundant. |
| 4. | They didn't know what we all knew. |

Note: one usually very reliable website (About.com) gives this example: *Little have I read concerning nanotechnology.* But this doesn't sound natural.

Pattern 4a - Inversion with Only + time expression

Only then did the truth dawn on me.

Only the next day did I fully understand what had happened.

Only when I met Susannah did I find true happiness.

Only once you've read the book will you see what I'm talking about.

Only after I had seen her picture in the newspaper did I realise who she was.

Note 1: these constructions are usually about the past, but they can also be about the future (as in the fourth example), in which they use similar verb forms to conditionals.

Note 2: the time expression can be anything from a single adverb, as in the first example, to a full adverbial clause with its own verb, as in the last two. This can sometimes make it a bit difficult to work out where to split the sentence.

Practice 4a. Make inverted sentences from the sentences below, with the format: **Only + adverbial of time + inversion + the rest**. Remember to only use the clue buttons if you get stuck.

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | I only found out the truth much later. |
| 2. | He was only really happy when he was sailing his yacht. |
| 3. | I'll only know what to do once I've read the report. |
| 4. | He only got a job in IT after taking a course in computing. |

Pattern 4b - Inversion with Only + other expressions

Only by bribing the porter did we manage to get a meal sent up to our room.

Only if you increase the discount can we possibly accept this deal.

Note: in these examples in 4a and 4b, **only** means '*in no other situation or place*'. When it is used with this meaning and begins the sentence, inversion must follow. But if it is used in the meaning of '*a limited number*', we can begin a sentence with **Only** without using inversion:

Only five people turned up to the meeting yesterday.

Inversion with expressions with *no, not, neither* and *nor*

Pattern 5a - at no time / nowhere

At no time was I aware that we were being followed.

But Officer! **Nowhere** does it say that parking here is forbidden.

At no (other) time are the hills quite *so* beautiful.

Nowhere (else) can you see *more beautiful* sunsets.

The expression **at no time** is often used, as in the first example, with verbs of cognition - **think, be aware, imagine** etc. **Nowhere** is often used about (the lack of) information, with verbs like - **say, tell, inform** etc

In the second pair of examples, however, both expressions are used for making comparisons, and are often used like this with expressions with **so** or **such**, or a comparative.

Practice 5a Make new inverted sentences from these sentences, changing the adverbials to negative and putting them at the beginning of the sentences. Remember you will also have to change the verb to positive. **We can't have no double negatives!**

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | She didn't at any time realise to what extent he had been lying to her. |
| 2. | I haven't read anywhere that a degree is necessary for this job. |
| 3. | You can't get such a good pizza anywhere else. |
| 4. | The city is not so peaceful at any other time of the year. |

Pattern 5b - on no account / under no circumstances

On no account should the back door be left unlocked.
Under no circumstances may an employee accept a bribe.
On no account are the premises to be left unattended.

premises - a building and the area of land that it is on

Under no circumstances will a refund be given without a receipt.

These expressions are used to strongly express what is not allowed.

Practice 5b Make new inverted sentences from these sentences, changing the adverbials to negative and putting them at the beginning of the sentences.

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Credit will not on any account be given. |
| 2. | Staff may not smoke on the job under any circumstances. |
| 3. | Security cards are not under any circumstances to be lent to non-staff. |
| 4. | Staff should not on any account give out a colleague's phone number. |

Pattern 5c - expressions with not

Note that when these statements refer to the future, they use verb forms similar to 1st and 2nd Conditionals.

not until

Not until much later did he find out the truth.

Not until long after he had left university did he really know what he wanted to do in life.

not for

Not for a million pounds will I marry that woman after what she did to me!

Not for all the tea in China would I take that job.

not for all the tea in China – not for any reason (informal + old-fashioned)

not even if

Not even if they paid me triple would I work the weekend of our wedding anniversary. It's more than my life's worth.

Practice 5c Make new inverted sentences from these sentences, starting with 'Not'. Remember to change the verb to positive if necessary.

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | We can't give you a refund until we've heard from the insurance people. |
| 2. | I didn't like Shakespeare until I saw Branagh's Henry V. |
| 3. | I wouldn't miss this match for the world. |
| 4. | I wouldn't eat at that restaurant again even if you dragged me there. |

Pattern 5d - not only ... (but) (also)

Not only do I think he's a liar, but I also think he's dishonest.

Not only is she intelligent, she's also incredibly attractive.

Not only am I right this time, I'm always right.

This construction links two independent clauses, both of which would make sense on their own. Note that while the first clause is inverted, the second uses normal word order. The **but** and the **also** are both optional.

Pattern 5e - neither ... nor

Neither do I believe a word he says, nor do I trust him an inch.

Note: in this construction both parts are inverted.

The paired constructions in 5d and 5e, as well as **no sooner ... than** in Pattern 2, are known as correlative conjunctions [соотносительные союзы]. The clauses in each part should be 'parallel', that is, of equal length and grammatical form.

Pattern 5f - not for nothing (недаром)

*Davis scored twice and set up three other goals. **Not for nothing** was he named Man of the Match.*

*Helen Mirren's performance as 'The Queen' was absolutely flawless. **Not for nothing** was she awarded both an Oscar and a Golden Globe.*

This phrase means '**for good reasons**'. It is usually used when talking about people's reputations, achievements etc. It usually follows a sentence which gives an example of why this comment is justified.

We do use this in informal language, the '*Not for nothing*' sentence sometimes being used in reply to what someone else has said:

A: Have you heard? Pete's just brought in another three corporate accounts.

*B: Yeah. **Not for nothing** was he named Salesman of the Year.*

Pattern 5g - no way

***No way** am I going to get this finished tonight.*

Unlike other negative inversions, which are usually only used in formal contexts, especially in writing, **no way** is very informal and is used mainly in speech. It is often used on its own:

*'Are you going to get this finished tonight?' - '**No way** (José)'*

To avoid having to use inversion we sometimes put '**There's**' before it, but the inverted version has greater dramatic effect.

***There's no way** I'm going to get this finished tonight.*

Practice 5d, 5e, 5f, 5g Make new inverted sentences from these sentences, starting with '**Not, Neither or No**'. Remember to change the verb to positive if necessary. In the first two use a comma to separate the clauses.

| | |
|----|--|
| 1. | He plays the piano and he is also an accomplished violinist. (use but) |
| 2. | She doesn't smoke and she doesn't drink. |
| 3. | There are good reasons why 2008 was called the year of crisis. |
| 4. | I'm not going to eat these insects, whatever you say. No way. |

SUMMARY

1 - Negative inversion with adverbs of frequency.

Never have I tasted such a delicious meal. | **Rarely** can a young chef have had success so young.

Hardly ever has a competition been won so early on in the game.

Seldom has a simple omelette tasted better.

2 - Negative inversion with adverbs of time meaning 'only just' or 'immediately after'.

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Scarcely had I got out of bed, when the doorbell rang.

Barely had she passed her degree, when she was offered a job.

Hardly had we landed, when all hell let loose.

3 - Inversion with Little ...

Little does he know what the boss *has in store* for him.

Little did she realise what a stupid remark she had made.

Little did we suspect that we would never see each other again.

4a - Inversion with Only + time expression

Only then did the truth dawn on me. | **Only the next day** did I fully understand what had happened.

Only when I met Susannah did I find true happiness.

Only once you've read the book will you see what I'm talking about.

Only after I had seen her picture in the newspaper did I realise who she was.

4b - Inversion with Only + other expressions

Only by bribing the porter did we manage to get a meal sent up to our room.

Only if you increase the discount can we possibly accept this deal.

5a - at no time / nowhere

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5b - on no account / under no circumstances

On no account should the back door be left unlocked. | **On no account** are the premises to be left unattended.

Under no circumstances may an employee accept a bribe.

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5c - expressions with not

not until

Not until much later did he find out the truth.

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Not for a million pounds will I marry that woman after what she did to me!

Not for all the tea in China would I take that job.

not even if

Not even if they paid me triple would I work the weekend of our wedding anniversary.

5d - not only ... (but) (also)

Not only do I think he's a liar, **but I also** think he's dishonest.

Not only is she intelligent, she's **also** incredibly attractive.

Not only am I right this time, I'm always right.

5e - neither ... nor (both parts are inverted)

Neither do I believe a word he says, **nor** do I trust him an inch.

5f - not for nothing (недаром)

Davis scored twice and set up three other goals. **Not for nothing** was he named Man of the Match.

Helen Mirren's performance as 'The Queen' was absolutely flawless. **Not for nothing** was she awarded both an Oscar and a Golden Globe.

5g - no way

No way am I going to get this finished tonight.

Negative inversion - practice exercises

Exercise 1 - Fill the gaps using the words in the box.

has · before · than · audience · then · was · started · will · can · did · so many · had

| | |
|-----|--|
| 1. | Hardly ever ----- an athlete won so many medals in such a short time. |
| 2. | Little ----- we realise what a social faux-pas we had committed. [faux pas [,fəu'pɑː] - <i>неудачный шаг, необдуманное решение, бестактность</i>] |
| 3. | Scarcely ----- the match started when the trouble began. |
| 4. | Only by standing on tip-toe ----- I able to see anything at all. |
| 5. | Seldom can an ----- have heard a better interpretation of this symphony. |
| 6. | Hardly had the controversial opera ----- when people began to walk out. |
| 7. | Only if we leave now ----- we be in time to catch the train. |
| 8. | Never have I seen ----- people turn out for this event. |
| 9. | Rarely ----- a remark have been more ill-judged. |
| 10. | Only ----- did it become clear what the extent of the damage was. |
| 11. | Barely had we had time to pack up the picnic things ----- the heavens opened |
| 12. | No sooner had we asked for a quieter room room, ----- we were given one. |

Exercise 2 - Fill the gaps using the words in the box.

else · way · did · circumstances · nothing · such · nor · until · would · account · only · even

| | |
|-----|--|
| 1. | At no time ----- he seem to realise what an idiot he was making of himself. |
| 2. | At no time before have I heard ----- arrant nonsense. |
| 3. | Nowhere ----- do they charge you so much for water |
| 4. | On no ----- should you miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. |
| 5. | Under no ----- must this door be left unlocked. |
| 6. | Not ----- she apologises for what she said will I speak to her again. |
| 7. | Not ----- if they halved the price would I buy such a heap of old rubbish. |
| 8. | Not for all the money in the world ----- I do what you're suggesting. |
| 9. | Not ----- do I know you're wrong, but I can also prove you're wrong. |
| 10. | Neither was the food up to standard ----- was the service particularly good. |
| 11. | Everyone except me got soaked. Not for ----- do I always carry an umbrella. |
| 12. | No ----- am I going to jump into that icy cold water! |

Practice Exercises

Remember that when there is more than one auxiliary verb, only the first one is inverted.

Exercise 3 - Make inverted sentences from the sentences given, using the words in brackets.

| | |
|-----|--|
| 1. | You shouldn't tell him about my trip to China. (On no ...) |
| 2. | You are not going to get me to eat that! (No way ... !) |
| 3. | I have seldom seen such a brilliant goal. (Seldom ...) |
| 4. | Such a hurricane has rarely happened in Hereford. (Hardly ever ...) |
| 5. | I wouldn't want to hurt your feelings for all the world. (Not ...) |
| 6. | They were never aware of the danger that threatened them. (At no time ...) |
| 7. | This must not leak out to the press. (Under ...) |
| 8. | He wasn't rich and he wasn't handsome. (Neither ...) |
| 9. | We haven't often witnessed such artistry. (Rarely ...) |
| 10. | The bridge collapsed as soon as we managed to get across. (No sooner ...) |
| 11. | We were only able to cross the border by offering him a bribe. (Only ...) |
| 12. | Immediately he opened his mouth he started complaining about everything. (Barely ... before ...) |

Exercise 4 - Make inverted sentences from the sentences given, using the words in brackets.

| | |
|-----|---|
| 1. | She has no idea what a surprise she's going to get. (Little ... know) |
| 2. | The bell had barely started to ring when the children rushed out of the classroom. (Scarcely) |
| 3. | He didn't start his speech until there was absolute silence in the hall (Not ...) |
| 4. | We will only be able to accept your offer if we are offered free delivery (Only ...) |
| 5. | It is with good reason that Edinburgh is known as the Athens of the North (Not for ...) |
| 6. | We have never been so well wined and dined in our lives (Never ...) |
| 7. | She didn't break the news of her engagement until after dinner (Only ...) |
| 8. | We weren't told that we would need our passports. (At no time ...) |
| 9. | They don't charge you as much for water anywhere else. (Nowhere else ...) |
| 10. | I wouldn't fly with them again even if they offered me a free flight. (Not even ...) |
| 11. | We had barely entered the shop when an assistant jumped on us. (Hardly ... when ...) |
| 12. | He is both charming and very rich. (Not only ..., but ... also ...) |