

## Inversion after Negative Adverbials

When certain adverbial expressions are put in the *initial position* of a sentence or clause they require the inversion of the verb and subject, as with the interrogative form. Simple tenses take an auxiliary (forms of 'do') and the inversion is between this and the subject whereas compound tenses have the inversion of the auxiliary ('have' or 'are' [passive]) and the subject. The effect of this initial position structure is highly emphatic or rhetorical.

1. **Never:** Never *have I seen* such a mess as in this room!
2. **Nowhere:** Nowhere *had we eaten* better than at that little restaurant we found in Bologna. = we had the best meal of our lives there
3. **Little:** Little *do you know* what I am planning to do for your birthday! = emphasis to increase expectations  
Little *do I care* what you do. = I am absolutely uninterested in you, though I may have been before
4. **Hardly:** Hardly *had I decided* to lose weight than the Chocolate Festival was held in Florence. = the two events are unconnected but irony is produced by their simultaneous occurrence.  
Hardly *had we got on* the train when it left. = the two events happened very quickly one after another.
5. **Scarcely:** Scarcely *did she eat* for three days, she was too upset, but luckily she kept drinking.
6. **Rarely:** Rarely *have I been* so insulted! How dare you?
7. **Seldom:** Seldom *does she remain* in Florence for the summer, it's far too hot!
8. **Under no circumstances:** Under no circumstances *are you allowed* to stay out past midnight!
9. **No longer:** No longer *will she try* to pass the 1st year exam - she has decided to change degree course
10. **No sooner ... than:** No sooner *did she see* her mother than she burst into tears, she had been so worried

§ With the following adverbial expressions in the initial position, the inversion occurs in the **second, or following, clause**:

11. **Only if:** Only if I pay them *will my children do* small jobs for me.
12. **Only when:** Only when I reached the exam room *did I realize* that I had left my dictionary on the train.
13. **Only after ...ing:** Only after buying a new copy *did I find* the book I had lost.

§ N.B. When 'only' means 'being the only one(s)', there is **no** inversion:  
Only a few students managed to pass the B2 test. = Most students failed

14. **Neither ... nor:** I am prepared neither to accept a reduction in pay *nor will I be transferred* to Rome.

§ N.B. The inversion occurs in the 'nor' clause. However, as with 'only', when 'neither nor' means 'not any' or 'no one', there is **no** inversion:  
Neither I nor my children eat meat. = I do not eat meat, my children do not eat meat.

**... and finally...**

15. **Not until:** Not until I reached the 3rd year of my English course *did I learn* to use inversion with negative adverbials correctly!

**Let us now hope this is not the case!**

Exercise 1 Underline the correct form in italics.

1. Not until it was too late *I remembered/did I remember* to ring my mother.
2. Hardly *we had found our seats/had we found our seats* than the film began.
3. No sooner *it had stopped/had it stopped* raining than the bus arrived.
- 4 Only after checking in the dictionary *I knew/did I know* how to spell 'participate'
5. Only when *does the letter arrive/the letter arrives we shall know/shall we know* if our offer has been accepted.
6. Only two students *remembered/did they remember* to do the homework
7. Only if *you promise/promise you/do you promise* not to tell anyone else *I shall tell you/shall I tell you* what happened last night.

Exercise 2 Complete the second sentence so that it has the same meaning as the first sentence.

1. My friend speaks English and she is also fluent in French.

Not only .....

2. I didn't at all suspect that my best friend was going out with my boyfriend.

Little .....

3. It's not usual for it to be so warm in February.

Seldom .....

4. It is the finest performance of *Hamlet* I have ever seen.

Never .....

5. The teacher had only occasionally come across a student with such a good level of English.

Rarely .....

6. I had only just got used to my Bancomat number when I lost the card....

No sooner .....

7. Jane refuses to go out in the rain and she won't go out in the snow either.

Neither in the rain nor .....

8. "You are absolutely forbidden to have a party in the house while we are away!" said her parents as they left for the weekend.

"Under no circumstances ....."