

88 Inversion

Reversing the normal order of words, or inversion, can be used for emphasis or a sense of drama. It is common after certain types of adverbials.

See also:

Present simple 1 Types of verbs 49

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88.1 INVERSION AFTER NEGATIVE ADVERBIALS

In more formal or literary texts, inversion of a verb and its subject is used for emphasis after negative adverbial phrases like “not only,” “not since,” and “only when.”



In this simple sentence, the subject comes before the verb.

She is a famous singer. She is also a very good actor.

Not only is she a famous singer, **but she's also** a very good actor.

After the negative adverbial, the subject and the verb swap places.

“But” is optional.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

The auxiliary and subject swap places.

Not since my childhood **have I** enjoyed a performance so much.

Not until the performance was over **did he** look up at the audience.



Where there is no auxiliary verb, “do” is used.

Only if it stops raining **will the race** go ahead this afternoon.

Only when he emerged from the car **did the fans** start cheering.



Only after the race **did he** realize what he had achieved.

Little did they know how lucky they are to be successful.

Little did they realize how difficult fame would be.



88.2 INVERSION AFTER TIME ADVERBIALS

Inversion can be used after time adverbials that are negative or restrictive, such as “no sooner” and “never before.” This emphasizes the time at which something happens, or happened.

In this simple sentence, the subject comes before the verb.

Tina had just released an album when she starred in her first movie.



No sooner **had Tina** released an album **than** she starred in her first movie.

The subject (“Tina”) and the auxiliary verb (“had”) swap places.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Hardly had she stepped out of the car **when** fans surrounded her.



Rarely do you meet a celebrity with such talent and style.



Never before had a song reached the top of the charts so quickly.



Only sometimes does it not snow during the ski season.



88.3 INVERSION AFTER “SO” AND “NEITHER”

In order to agree with a positive statement, “be” and its subject, or an auxiliary and its subject can be inverted after “so.” For a negative statement, the same is done after “neither.” For a sentence that doesn’t have an auxiliary, “do” is used when it is inverted.

I've never been to China.



Neither have I.

I need to get some new clothes.



So do I.

When there is no auxiliary verb, “do” is used.

I'm excited for the party tonight.



So am I!