

Inversion (2)

A

Inversion after negative adverbials

In formal and literary language in particular, we use negative adverbials at the beginning of a clause. The subject and first auxiliary are inverted, and **do** is used with a simple tense verb after –

☆ the time adverbials **never (before), rarely, seldom; barely/hardly/scarcely...when/before; no sooner...than:**

- Seldom do** *we* have goods returned to us because they are faulty.
- Hardly had** *everybody* taken their seats when Dr Smith began his lecture.

☆ **only + a time expression**, as in **only after, only later, only if, only once, only then, only when:**

- She bought a newspaper and some sweets at the shop on the corner. **Only later did** *she* realise that she'd been given the wrong change.
- Only once did** *I* go to the opera the whole time I was in Italy. *Had I ever climbed*
- Only when she apologises will** *I* speak to her again.

☆ **only + other prepositional phrases beginning only by..., only in..., only with..., etc.:**

- Only by chance had** *Jameson* discovered where the birds were nesting.
- Mary had to work in the evenings and at weekends. **Only in this way was** *she* able to complete the report by the deadline.

☆ expressions such as **at no time, in no way, on no account, under/in no circumstances:**

- At no time did** *they* actually break the rules of the game.
- Under no circumstances are** *passengers* permitted to open the doors themselves.

☆ expressions with **not..., such as not only, not until, not since, not for one moment** and also **not a + noun:**

- Not until August did** *the government* order an inquiry into the accident.
- Not a word had** *she* written since the exam had started.

☆ **little** with a negative meaning:

- Little do** *they* know how lucky they are to live in such a wonderful house. (= 'they don't know' or 'they don't know sufficiently')
- Little did** *I* realise that one day Michael would become famous. (= 'I didn't realise' or 'I didn't realise sufficiently')

Notice that inversion can occur after a clause beginning **only after/if/when** or **not until:**

- Only when the famine gets worse will** *world governments* begin to act.
- Not until the train pulled into Euston Station did** *Jim* find that his coat had gone.

B

Inversion after **so + adjective... that; such + be...that; neither.../nor...**

We can use **so + adjective** at the beginning of a clause to give special emphasis to the adjective. When we do this, the subject and first auxiliary are inverted, and **do** is used with a simple tense verb. Compare:

- Her business was so successful that Marie was able to retire at the age of 50. *and*
- So successful was** *her business*, that Marie was able to retire at the age of 50.
- The weather conditions became so dangerous that all mountain roads were closed. *and*
- So dangerous did** *weather conditions become*, that all mountain roads were closed.

We can use **such + be** at the beginning of a clause to emphasise the extent or degree of something. Compare:

- Such is** *the popularity* of the play that the theatre is likely to be full every night. *and*
- The play is so popular that the theatre is likely to be full every night.

We use inversion after **neither** and **nor** when these words begin a clause to introduce a negative addition to a previous negative clause or sentence:

- For some time after the explosion Jack couldn't hear, and **neither could** *he see*.
- The council never wanted the new supermarket to be built, **nor did** *local residents*.

Notice that we also use inversion in **Neither/Nor do I, Neither/Nor does Kate** (etc.) and in **So do I, So does Becky** (etc.).

Exercises

Unit 100

100.1 Write new sentences with a similar meaning beginning with one of these words and phrases. (A)

only if barely only with ~~rarely~~ at no time little

- 1 A new film has not often before produced such positive reviews.
Rarely has a new film produced such positive reviews.....
- 2 The public was never in any danger.
- 3 He only felt entirely relaxed with close friends and family.
- 4 The match won't be cancelled unless the pitch is frozen.
- 5 I didn't know then that Carmen and I would be married one day.
- 6 He had only just entered the water when it became clear he couldn't swim.

Now do the same using these words and phrases. (A)

only once only in on no account hardly not only not for one moment

- 7 You must not light the fire if you are alone in the house.
- 8 There was never any competitiveness between the three brothers.
- 9 I wasn't only wet through, I was freezing cold.
- 10 I had only ever climbed this high once before.
- 11 The audience had only just taken their seats when the conductor stepped on to the stage.
- 12 He has only been acknowledged to be a great author in the last few years.

100.2 Complete these sentences in any appropriate way. You can use the following words in your answers. (B)

alike boring complicated dominance ~~interest~~ strength

- 1 Such *is the interest in Dr Lowe's talk*..... that it will be held in a bigger lecture theatre.
- 2 Such that few buildings were left standing in the town.
- 3 Such that he hasn't lost a match for over three years.
- 4 So that even their parents couldn't tell them apart.
- 5 So that it even took a computer three days to solve it.
- 6 So that most of the students went to sleep.

100.3 Correct any mistakes you find in this newspaper item. (Units 99 & 100)

TOWN EVACUATED AS FOREST FIRES APPROACH

The people of Sawston were evacuated yesterday as forest fires headed towards the town. Such the heat was of the oncoming inferno that trees more than 100 metres ahead began to smoulder. Only once in recent years, during 1994, a town of this size has had to be evacuated because of forest fires. A fleet of coaches and lorries arrived in the town in the early morning. Into these vehicles the sick and elderly climbed, before they headed off to safety across the river. Residents with cars left by mid morning, as all non-essential police officers did.

Hardly the evacuation had been completed when the wind changed direction and it became clear that the fire would leave Sawston untouched. Soon after that were heard complaints from some residents. "At no time the fires posed a real threat," said one local man. "I didn't want to leave my home, and nor most of my neighbours did." So upset some elderly residents are that they are threatening to complain to their MP. But Chief Fire Officer Jones replied, "Hadn't we taken this action, lives would have been put at risk. Only when the fires have moved well away from the town residents will be allowed to return to their homes."

- 4 'No, what I meant was that she could borrow it until I needed it again.'
- 6 'No, what I did was (to) put some oil and soy sauce on it and grill it.'
- 7 'No, what I did was (to) give her some money towards it.'
- 8 'No, what I did was (to) hire a car and drive all the way.'

98.3 Suggested answers

- 2 I don't know if he's free, but somebody who/ that might be able to help is Saleh. (or ...but Saleh is somebody who/ that might be able to help.)
- 3 In fact the place where/ that I grew up is between this village and the next. (or ...the place that I grew up in...)
- 4 I suppose the time when I lived in Australia was when I was happiest.

UNIT 99

99.1

- 1 (in a narrative 'down comes' is also possible; see Unit 2)
- 2 along comes
- 3 up go
- 4 back/ away he went
- 5 out/ in came (or comes)
- 6 along/ up came (or comes)
- 7 off/ away she went (or goes)

99.2

- 2 + h Should you not wish to receive further information about our products, put a tick in the box.
- 3 + a Were the plane ever (to be) built, it would cut the journey time from New York to Tokyo by 4 hours.
- 4 + g Should United win again today, it will be their tenth consecutive victory.
- 5 + d Were I (to be) asked to take the job, I would have no hesitation in accepting.
- 6 + i Had a car been coming in the other direction, I might have been seriously injured.
- 7 + f Had there been a referendum on the issue, it is unlikely that the country would have supported the government.

- 8 + b Should you not be able to afford the Rombus 2000, there are less expensive models in the range.
- 9 + e Were Charles Dickens (to be) alive today, he would be writing novels about the homeless in London.

99.3

- 2 I was opposed to the new road being built, as was everyone else in the village.
- 3 Karen went to Oxford University, as did her mother and sister.
- 4 People in poorer countries consume a far smaller proportion of the earth's resources than do those in developed nations.
- 5 He is a much better teacher now than he was 5 years ago. (no inversion with a pronoun as subject)
- 6 Don is a keen golfer, as is his wife.

UNIT 100

100.1

- 2 At no time was the public (ever) in any danger.
- 3 Only with close friends and family did he feel entirely relaxed.
- 4 Only if the pitch is frozen will the match be cancelled.
- 5 Little did I know then that Carmen and I would be married one day.
- 6 Barely had he entered the water when it became clear he couldn't swim.
- 7 On no account are you to light the fire if you are alone in the house. (or On no account should/ must you...)
- 8 Not for one moment was there any competitiveness between the three brothers.
- 9 Not only was I wet through, I was freezing cold.
- 10 Only once had I ever climbed this high before. or Only once before had I ever climbed this high.
- 11 Hardly had the audience taken their seats when the conductor stepped onto the stage.

- 12 Only in the last few years has he been acknowledged to be a great author.

100.2 Possible answers

- 2 ...was the strength of the earthquake...
- 3 ...is his dominance in the sport...
- 4 ...alike were the twins...
- 5 ...complicated was the equation...
- 6 ...boring was the lesson...

100.3 Corrections are given in the underlined sections

The people of Sawston were evacuated yesterday as forest fires headed towards the town. Such was the heat of the oncoming inferno that trees more than 100 metres ahead began to smoulder. Only once in recent years, during 1994, has a town of this size (inversion is likely in this written context) had to be evacuated because of forest fires. A fleet of coaches and lorries arrived in the town in the early morning. Into these vehicles climbed the sick and elderly (inversion is likely in this written context), before they headed off to safety across the river. Residents with cars left by mid morning, as did all non-essential police officers.

Hardly had the evacuation been completed when the wind changed direction and it became clear that the fire would leave Sawston untouched. Soon after that complaints were heard from some residents. "At no time did the fires pose a real threat," said one local man. "I didn't want to leave my home, and nor did most of my neighbours." So upset are some elderly residents that they are threatening to complain to their MP. But Chief Fire Officer Jones replied, "Had we not taken this action, lives would have been put at risk. Only when the fires have moved well away from the town will residents be allowed to return to their homes."