What is an inversion with a negative adverbial?

In formal English, we can place a **negative or restrictive adverb** at the beginning of a sentence to make the sentence more emphatic or dramatic. When we do this, the adverb is then followed by an inversion: **auxiliary verb + subject (+ verb)**. See the example below:

* *I could find my keys****nowhere****. ⇒****Nowhere******could I find****my keys.*

When there is no auxiliary verb, we use **do**/**does** (present) or **did** (past) as auxiliary.

* *I understand the true meaning****only now****. ⇒****Only now******do I understand****the true meaning.*
* *I did****n’t****say anything****until she arrived****. ⇒****Not until she arrived******did I say****anything.*

Common adverbs used with this structure

In the table below you can see some of the most common negative or restrictive adverbials that are sometimes used at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis.



Hardly, barely, scarcely, no sooner

We normally use **hardly … when, barely … when**,**scarcely … when**, and **no sooner … than** in narratives with past perfect in the inversion.

We use **no sooner … than** (NOT , or )

Adverbial + clause + inversion

**Note** that after some adverbials, such as **only if**and **only when** we use a subordinate clause (subject + verb), and that the inversion is never in the subordinate clause but in the main verb of the sentence. Check the sentence below:

* ***Only when I sleep******can I forget****about the accident.*(NOT: …)

The same happens with other adverbials, such as **not since**and **not until**; we use a subordinate clause (subject + verb), and the inversion is never in the subordinate clause but in the sentence’s main verb. Check the sentence below:

* ***Not since I was a child******have******I had****such a great time.*(NOT:  …)

If you are in doubt, it’s always useful to look at the sentence without the negative adverbial at the beginning.

* ***I can forget****about the accident only when I sleep.*
* ***I haven’t had****such a great time since I was a child.*

The main subject and verb are at the beginning of the sentence, and this is the element that must be in the inversion.

Not

We must always use **not** followed by another element before the inversion.

* ***Not often******can we see****such great expressions of art.* (NOT *.*)

Adverbs of frequency

We can also use inversion after the negative or restrictive adverbs of frequency, such as **seldom**, **rarely**, or **never**.

We often use **never** to talk about experiences. In that case, we normally use present perfect or past perfect.