

Inversion after negative expressions

When a negative adverb or expression is put at the beginning of a sentence, it is usually followed by auxiliary verb + subject. These structures are mostly formal.

Under no circumstances can we appoint him as director. (NOT Under no circumstances we can appoint him as director.)

Not until much later did she realize that she had made a huge mistake. (NOT Not until much later she realized that she had made a huge mistake.)

Inversion is also used after negative words like hardly, seldom, rarely, little, never and after expressions containing only.

Hardly had I reached the station when the train arrived. (NOT Hardly I had reached the station ...)

Seldom have I seen such a mess. (NOT Seldom I have seen such a mess.)

Little did he realize the danger he faced.

Only then did I understand what was happening.

No sooner had she read the letter than she started crying.

Scarcely had I solved one problem when another cropped up.

Note that these structures are rather formal or literary. In a less formal style, we begin these sentences with their proper subjects.

I had hardly reached the station when the train arrived.

I have seldom seen such a mess.