

Inversion

The auxiliary verb comes before the subject in several different structures. This is usually referred to as 'inversion'.

Examples

Never have I seen such a mess!

Not only do I enjoy classical music, but I also have regular music lessons.

An inversion generally begins with a negative word or phrase.

Negative Adverbials

If a negative adverb or adverbial expression is put at the beginning of a clause for emphasis, it is usually followed by auxiliary verb + subject.

Time expressions: never, rarely, seldom

These time expressions are usually followed by perfect verb forms or modal auxiliary verbs.

Seldom have I seen anything more remarkable.

Never have I seen such a vast crowd.

Time expressions: hardly, barely, no sooner, or scarcely

These time expressions are used to talk about two past events that happen one after the other.

Hardly had she arrived, when problems started.

Scarcely had I sat down when the doorbell rang.

No sooner had he finished dinner, than he started feeling ill.

Sentences beginning with 'only' also follow an inverted word order.

Inversion

Only then did I understand what I had done.

Only after her death was I able to love her.

After 'Little'

Little is a negative word. Sentences beginning with little also have an inverted word order.

Little did she understand what she was doing.

Little did I realize the danger I faced.

Inverted Conditional Forms

In conditional clauses, an auxiliary verb can be put before the subject instead of using if.

Were I you, I wouldn't do it. (= If I were you, I wouldn't do it.)

Had I understood the problem, I wouldn't have made those mistakes. (= If I had understood the problem, I wouldn't have made those mistakes.)