

Inversion (part 2)

Grammar Lesson, Examples & 30 Practice Questions

Inversion (Part 2): Advanced Structures in English

In English grammar, **inversion** means reversing the normal word order of a sentence — placing the auxiliary verb or modal verb *before* the subject. At C1 level, you already know basic inversion with *never*, *rarely*, and *seldom*. In this lesson, we go deeper.

This lesson covers **advanced inversion structures** used in formal writing, literature, speeches, and academic English. These include inversion after *not only ... but also*, *no sooner ... than*, *hardly ... when*, *so ... that*, *such ... that*, *only + time expressions*, and conditional inversion without *if*.

Mastering these structures will make your writing and speaking significantly more sophisticated and natural at C1 level.

Why Do We Use Inversion?

Inversion is used in formal and literary English to:

- add **emphasis** to a particular idea
- create a more **dramatic or formal** tone
- vary sentence structure for **stylistic effect**
- follow fixed grammatical patterns that require inverted word order

Normal word order: **Subject + Auxiliary + Main Verb**

Inverted word order: **Auxiliary + Subject + Main Verb**

She had barely sat down. → **Hardly had she sat down ...**

Inversion After "Not Only ... But Also"

When a sentence begins with **not only**, the auxiliary verb moves in front of the subject in the first clause. The second clause (*but also*) keeps normal word order.

Pattern

Not only + auxiliary/modal + subject + verb ... but also + subject + verb

Examples

- *Not only **did** she pass the exam, but she also received the highest mark.*
- *Not only **is** he a talented musician, but he also composes his own songs.*
- *Not only **have** they broken the agreement, but they have also refused to negotiate.*
- *Not only **will** the project save money, but it will also reduce emissions.*

Forming the Inversion

Normal Sentence	Inverted Sentence
She not only forgot her keys but also her wallet.	Not only did she forget her keys, but she also forgot her wallet.
He not only speaks French but also writes it fluently.	Not only does he speak French, but he also writes it fluently.
They had not only missed the train but also lost their tickets.	Not only had they missed the train, but they had also lost their tickets.

Inversion After "No Sooner ... Than"

No sooner ... than expresses that one event happened immediately after another. When the sentence begins with *no sooner*, inversion is required in the first clause. Use the **past perfect** in the inverted clause and the **past simple** after *than*.

Pattern

No sooner + had + subject + past participle ... than + subject + past simple

Examples

- *No sooner **had** I sat down than the phone rang.*
- *No sooner **had** the match started than it began to rain.*
- *No sooner **had** she opened the letter than she burst into tears.*
- *No sooner **had** they arrived at the hotel than the power went out.*

No Sooner ... Than: Table

Clause 1 (Inverted: Past Perfect)	Clause 2 (Normal: Past Simple)
No sooner had we left the house ...	... than it started to snow.
No sooner had he finished speaking ...	... than the audience began to applaud.
No sooner had she fallen asleep ...	... than the alarm went off.

Inversion After "Hardly/Scarcely ... When"

Hardly ... when and **scarcely ... when** have the same meaning as *no sooner ... than* — one event happened immediately after another. Again, use the **past perfect** in the inverted clause and the **past simple** after *when*.

Pattern

Hardly/Scarcely + had + subject + past participle ... when + subject + past simple

Examples

- *Hardly **had** we arrived when the argument broke out.*
- *Scarcely **had** he spoken when the room fell silent.*
- *Hardly **had** the ink dried when the document was challenged.*
- *Scarcely **had** she turned the key when the engine stopped working.*

Comparing the Three Structures

Structure	Conjunction in Clause 2	Example
No sooner had ...	than	No sooner had she left than he called.
Hardly had ...	when	Hardly had she left when he called.
Scarcely had ...	when	Scarcely had she left when he called.

Note: *No sooner ... than* is followed by *than*, while *hardly* and *scarcely* are followed by *when*. This is a very common exam mistake.

Inversion After "Only" + Time Expressions

When a sentence begins with **only** followed by a time expression or prepositional phrase, inversion is required. These structures are very common in formal and academic writing.

Common "Only" Expressions That Trigger Inversion

- **Only when**
- **Only after**
- **Only then**
- **Only by**
- **Only if**
- **Only once**
- **Only later**

Pattern

Only + time expression + auxiliary/modal + subject + main verb

Examples

- *Only when she read the report **did** she understand the full extent of the problem.*
- *Only after the meeting **did** the team agree on a course of action.*
- *Only then **did** we realise what had happened.*
- *Only by working together **can** we hope to solve this crisis.*
- *Only if you register in advance **will** you receive a discount.*
- *Only once the data had been verified **could** the results be published.*

Only + Time Expression: Table

Only Expression	Example Sentence
Only when	Only when the rain stopped did we continue our walk.
Only after	Only after years of study did he become a specialist.
Only then	Only then did I appreciate how serious it was.
Only by	Only by practising daily can you improve.
Only if	Only if demand rises will we increase production.
Only once	Only once the contract was signed did work begin.

Inversion After "So ... That" and "Such ... That"

When **so + adjective/adverb** or **such + noun phrase** comes at the beginning of a sentence for emphasis, inversion follows in the main clause.

Pattern with "So"

So + adjective/adverb + auxiliary + subject + verb ... that + clause

Examples with "So"

- So **exhausted** was she that she could barely speak.
- So **rapidly** did the situation change that no one was prepared.
- So **convincing** was his argument that the jury believed him immediately.
- So **great** was the demand that supplies ran out within hours.

Pattern with "Such"

Such + (a/an) + adjective + noun + auxiliary + subject + verb ... that + clause

Examples with "Such"

- Such **was her determination** that she refused to give up.
- Such **was the scale of the disaster** that thousands were left homeless.
- Such **a talented performer was he** that audiences travelled from across the country to see him.

So ... That vs Such ... That

Structure	Used With	Inverted Example
So + adjective/adverb	Adjectives and adverbs	So tired was he that he fell asleep standing up.
Such + noun phrase	Nouns (with or without adjective)	Such was her talent that she won every award.

Conditional Inversion (Without "If")

In formal English, we can remove *if* from conditional sentences and use inversion instead. This is a very important advanced structure. It is used with three main conditionals.

Second Conditional Without "If" (Unreal Present/Future)

Replace *if + were* with **Were + subject + ...**

With "if"	With Inversion (No "if")
If I were you, I would reconsider.	Were I you, I would reconsider.
If she were more experienced, she would get the job.	Were she more experienced, she would get the job.
If this were possible, we would do it.	Were this possible, we would do it.

Third Conditional Without "If" (Unreal Past)

Replace *if + had* with **Had + subject + past participle**

With "if"	With Inversion (No "if")
If he had known, he would have helped.	Had he known, he would have helped.
If we had arrived earlier, we would have seen her.	Had we arrived earlier, we would have seen her.
If they had taken my advice, this wouldn't have happened.	Had they taken my advice, this wouldn't have happened.

Mixed/Formal Conditional Without "If" (With "Should")

Replace *if + should* with **Should + subject + verb**. This is used for events that are unlikely but possible.

With "if"	With Inversion (No "if")
If you should need any assistance, please call us.	Should you need any assistance, please call us.
If there should be any problems, contact the manager.	Should there be any problems, contact the manager.
If you should change your mind, let me know.	Should you change your mind, let me know.

All Three Conditional Inversions at a Glance

Conditional Type	Original "if" Form	Inverted Form
Second (unreal present)	If + were ...	Were + subject ...

Conditional Type	Original "if" Form	Inverted Form
Third (unreal past)	If + had + past participle ...	Had + subject + past participle ...
Unlikely/formal possibility	If + should ...	Should + subject + verb ...

Special Cases and Additional Structures

Inversion After "Nor"

Nor is used to add a second negative point. It always triggers inversion.

- *She didn't apologise, nor **did** she acknowledge the mistake.*
- *He couldn't speak Spanish, nor **could** he understand it.*
- *The report was not completed on time, nor **was** the budget met.*

Inversion After "Neither"

Neither is used to agree with a negative statement. It triggers inversion.

- *"I didn't enjoy the film." — "Neither **did** I."*
- *"She can't attend." — "Neither **can** we."*
- *"They haven't finished." — "Neither **have** we."*

Inversion After Negative Prepositional Phrases

When a sentence starts with **at no time**, **under no circumstances**, **in no way**, **on no account**, or **by no means**, inversion is required.

- *Under no circumstances **should** you reveal the password.*
- *At no time **did** the company mislead its customers.*
- *In no way **does** this decision reflect our values.*
- *On no account **must** you open that door.*
- *By no means **is** this an easy task.*

Important Differences and Special Cases

Inversion vs Normal Word Order

Inversion is a **formal and literary** feature. In everyday spoken English, normal word order is preferred. Compare:

- Everyday: *I had barely sat down when the doorbell rang.*
- Formal/inverted: *Hardly had I sat down when the doorbell rang.*
- Everyday: *If I had known, I would have come sooner.*
- Formal/inverted: *Had I known, I would have come sooner.*

When NOT to Use Inversion

Do not use inversion after these words when they appear in the *middle* of a sentence — inversion is only triggered when these expressions appear at the **very beginning** of the clause.

- ✗ *She said that never **had she** been so embarrassed.* → ✓ *She said that she had never been so embarrassed.*

Does Conditional Inversion Work with First Conditionals?

First conditional inversion is not standard. The *should* inversion covers events that are unlikely but possible (sometimes called a "formal first conditional"). Do not invert standard first conditional sentences with *will*.

- ✗ *Will you come, I will be happy.*
- ✓ *Should you decide to come, I will be delighted.* (formal, unlikely possibility)

Common Mistakes

- ✗ *No sooner had she left when he called.*
- ✓ **No sooner ... than:** *No sooner had she left **than** he called.*
- ✗ *Hardly had they arrived than the news broke.*
- ✓ **Hardly ... when:** *Hardly had they arrived **when** the news broke.*
- ✗ *Not only she passed the exam, but she also got top marks.*
- ✓ **Inversion required:** *Not only **did she** pass the exam, but she also got top marks.*
- ✗ *Only when I arrived, I realised she was gone.*
- ✓ **Inversion required:** *Only when I arrived **did I** realise she was gone.*
- ✗ *If he would have known, he would have told us.*
- ✓ **Correct third conditional inversion:** ***Had** he known, he would have told us.*
- ✗ *Were she would come, I'd be pleased.*
- ✓ **Correct second conditional inversion:** ***Were** she to come, I'd be pleased.*
- ✗ *So tired she was that she fell asleep.*
- ✓ **Inversion required after "so":** *So tired **was she** that she fell asleep.*
- ✗ *Under no circumstances you should share this information.*
- ✓ **Inversion required:** *Under no circumstances **should you** share this information.*

Inversion (Part 2): Quick Summary

Here is an overview of all the advanced inversion structures covered in this lesson:

Trigger Expression	Example
Not only ... but also	Not only did she win, but she also broke the record.
No sooner ... than	No sooner had we left than the storm began.
Hardly/Scarcely ... when	Hardly had he spoken when the room fell silent.

Trigger Expression	Example
Only + time expression	Only then did I understand the truth.
So + adjective/adverb	So shocked was she that she couldn't respond.
Such + noun phrase	Such was his dedication that he never took a day off.
Conditional: Were (2nd)	Were I in your position, I would resign.
Conditional: Had (3rd)	Had they warned us, we would have been prepared.
Conditional: Should	Should you require help, do not hesitate to ask.
Nor / Neither	She didn't attend, nor did her colleague.
Negative prepositional phrases	Under no circumstances should this be shared.

Key points to remember:

- **Inversion** places the auxiliary verb before the subject.
- It is used in **formal, academic, and literary** English for emphasis and style.
- *No sooner* is followed by **than**; *hardly* and *scarcely* are followed by **when**.
- Conditional inversion removes *if* and uses **Were / Had / Should** at the start.
- Inversion is only triggered when these expressions appear at the **beginning of a clause**.

Now practise **inversion (part 2)** in the exercises below.

Inversion (part 2) – Practice Test

C1 | 30 Questions: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap & Fill-in-the-Blank

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 Not only ____ the project late, but it was also over budget.

- A** was delivered
- B** delivered was
- C** it was delivered
- D** it delivered was

2 Rarely ____ such a compelling argument presented in a courtroom.

- A** have I heard
- B** I have heard
- C** I heard
- D** heard I

3 No sooner ____ the announcement than the crowd erupted in applause.

- A** they had made
- B** had they made
- C** did they make
- D** they made

4 Under no circumstances ____ to share confidential client data.

- A** you are permitted
- B** are you permitted
- C** you permitted
- D** permitted you are

5 Hardly ____ down when the phone rang again.

- A** she sat
- B** sat she
- C** had she sat
- D** she had sat

6 Only after the contract was signed ____ the full terms of the agreement.

- A** they disclosed
- B** disclosed they
- C** did they disclose
- D** they did disclose

7 So convincingly ____ that even the judge seemed moved.

- A** she argued
- B** argued she
- C** did she argue
- D** she did argue

8 Not until the investigation was concluded ____ to make a statement.

- A** the minister agreed
- B** the minister did agree
- C** did the minister agree
- D** agreed the minister

9 Seldom ____ the opportunity to work with such a talented ensemble.

- A** actors have
- B** have actors
- C** actors had
- D** do actors have

10 Only by reviewing the data carefully ____ the discrepancy.

- A** they could identify
- B** could they identify
- C** they identified
- D** identified they

Part 2: Fill in the Gap (Questions 11–20)

11 Not only ____ the project on time, but they also exceeded all expectations.

- A** did they complete
- B** they completed
- C** they did complete

12 Rarely ____ such an outstanding performance from a debut artist.

- A** have we witnessed
- B** we have witnessed
- C** we witnessed

13 No sooner ____ the door than the alarm went off.

- A** had she opened
- B** she had opened
- C** did she open

14 Only after the investigation was concluded ____ the full extent of the fraud.

- A** did the public learn
- B** the public learned
- C** the public did learn

15 Under no circumstances ____ to leave the building without authorisation.

- A** are employees permitted
- B** employees are permitted
- C** employees permitted

16 Such ____ the impact of her speech that many in the audience were moved to tears.

- A** was
- B** had been
- C** were

17 Seldom ____ a manuscript of such historical significance come to auction.

- A** does
- B** do
- C** has

18 Not until decades later ____ how revolutionary his theories truly were.

- A** did scientists realise
- B** scientists realised
- C** scientists did realise

19 So convinced ____ of his innocence that she refused to consider any other possibility.

- A** was she
- B** she was
- C** is she

20 Little ____ that her groundbreaking discovery would reshape the entire field of medicine.

- A** did she know
- B** she knew
- C** she did know

Part 3: Fill in the Blank (Questions 21–30)

21 Not only _____ the championship, but she also broke the world record.

22 Rarely _____ such a talented group of musicians in one place.

23 No sooner _____ than the phone rang again.

24 Under no circumstances _____ the confidential details of the contract.

25 Little _____ how damaging the scandal would be to its reputation.

26 Scarcely _____ when the fire alarm went off.

27 Only when he read the report _____ the full extent of the crisis.

28 At no point _____ about the reasons for the long delay.

29 So complex _____ that even the senior lawyers struggled to reach a verdict.

30 Not until the results were published _____ the flaws in their methodology.

Answer Key & Explanations

Inversion (part 2) | C1

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **A** Correct Answer: was delivered ✓ Explanation: After Not only at the start of a clause, subject-auxiliary inversion is required. The auxiliary was moves before the subject, giving Not only was the project delivered late...
2. **A** Correct Answer: have I heard ✓ Explanation: The negative adverb Rarely triggers inversion, requiring the auxiliary have to precede the subject I. The structure is Rarely + auxiliary + subject + past participle.
3. **B** Correct Answer: had they made ✓ Explanation: No sooner...than expresses a sequence in the past perfect with inversion. The auxiliary had precedes the subject: No sooner had they made the announcement than...
4. **B** Correct Answer: are you permitted ✓ Explanation: Under no circumstances is a negative prepositional phrase that triggers inversion. The auxiliary are moves before the subject you: Under no circumstances are you permitted...
5. **C** Correct Answer: had she sat ✓ Explanation: Hardly...when requires the past perfect with inversion. The auxiliary had precedes the subject: Hardly had she sat down when the phone rang.
6. **C** Correct Answer: did they disclose ✓ Explanation: Only after is a restrictive adverbial that forces inversion in the main clause. The auxiliary did is inserted before the subject: Only after the contract was signed did they disclose...
7. **C** Correct Answer: did she argue ✓ Explanation: When So + adverb begins a clause to emphasise manner or degree, inversion is required. The auxiliary did is placed before the subject: So convincingly did she argue that...
8. **C** Correct Answer: did the minister agree ✓ Explanation: Not until placed at the start of a sentence triggers inversion in the main clause. The auxiliary did precedes the subject: Not until the investigation was concluded did the minister agree...
9. **D** Correct Answer: do actors have ✓ Explanation: Seldom is a negative frequency adverb that triggers inversion. Since the verb have is in the simple present, the auxiliary do is inserted before the subject: Seldom do actors have the opportunity...
10. **B** Correct Answer: could they identify ✓ Explanation: Only by is a restrictive fronted adverbial that requires inversion in the main clause. The modal could moves before the subject: Only by reviewing the data carefully could they identify the discrepancy.

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** Correct Answer: did they complete ✓ Explanation: After Not only at the start of a clause, subject-auxiliary inversion is required. We use did + subject + infinitive: Not only did they complete the project on time...
12. **A** Correct Answer: have we witnessed ✓ Explanation: Rarely is a negative adverb that triggers inversion when placed at the beginning of a sentence. The auxiliary have moves before the subject: Rarely have we witnessed such talent.
13. **A** Correct Answer: had she opened ✓ Explanation: No sooner...than requires past perfect inversion: had + subject + past participle. No sooner had she opened the door than the alarm went off.
14. **A** Correct Answer: did the public learn ✓ Explanation: Only after placed at the start of a sentence triggers auxiliary inversion in the main clause. We use did + subject + bare infinitive: Only after the investigation did the public learn...
15. **A** Correct Answer: are employees permitted ✓ Explanation: Under no circumstances is a negative expression that requires subject-auxiliary inversion: are + subject + past participle. Under no circumstances are employees permitted to leave...
16. **A** Correct Answer: was ✓ Explanation: Such was is a formal inversion structure used to emphasise degree or extent. The verb agrees with the singular noun impact: Such was the impact of her speech...
17. **A** Correct Answer: does ✓ Explanation: Seldom triggers inversion. Since a manuscript is singular and the sentence refers to a general truth in the present, we use does + subject + bare infinitive: Seldom does a manuscript... come to auction.
18. **A** Correct Answer: did scientists realise ✓ Explanation: Not until at the start of a sentence triggers inversion in the main clause, using did + subject + bare infinitive: Not until decades later did scientists realise...
19. **A** Correct Answer: was she ✓ Explanation: So + adjective at the start of a sentence triggers inversion with the verb to be. The auxiliary moves before the subject: So convinced was she... This is a formal literary structure.
20. **A** Correct Answer: did she know ✓ Explanation: Little used as a negative adverb at the beginning of a clause requires auxiliary inversion: did + subject + bare infinitive. Little did she know that her discovery would reshape medicine.

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **did she win** Correct Answer: did she win ✓ Explanation: After Not only at the start of a clause, we use inverted auxiliary + subject. The auxiliary did precedes the subject she, giving did she win.
22. **have I encountered** Correct Answer: have I encountered ✓ Explanation: Rarely is a negative adverb that triggers inversion. The auxiliary have moves before the subject I, forming have I encountered.

23. **had he sat down** Correct Answer: had he sat down ✓ Explanation: No sooner ... than is a fixed inversion structure. The past perfect auxiliary had is placed before the subject he, giving had he sat down.
24. **should you reveal** Correct Answer: should you reveal ✓ Explanation: Under no circumstances is a negative expression that requires subject-auxiliary inversion. The modal should precedes the subject you.
25. **did the company realize** Correct Answer: did the company realize ✓ Explanation: Little used as a negative adverb at the start of a clause triggers inversion. The auxiliary did precedes the subject the company.
26. **had the meeting begun** Correct Answer: had the meeting begun ✓ Explanation: Scarcely ... when is an inversion structure similar to No sooner ... than. The past perfect auxiliary had is placed before the subject the meeting.
27. **did he understand** Correct Answer: did he understand ✓ Explanation: Only when introduces a subordinate clause, and the main clause requires inversion. The auxiliary did precedes the subject he in the main clause.
28. **were the passengers informed** Correct Answer: were the passengers informed ✓ Explanation: At no point is a negative adverbial phrase that forces subject-auxiliary inversion. The auxiliary were moves before the subject the passengers.
29. **was the legal dispute** Correct Answer: was the legal dispute ✓ Explanation: When So + adjective begins a clause, inversion is required. The verb was precedes the subject the legal dispute, emphasising the degree of complexity.
30. **did the researchers acknowledge** Correct Answer: did the researchers acknowledge ✓ Explanation: Not until at the beginning of a sentence introduces a time clause, and the main clause requires inversion. The auxiliary did precedes the subject the researchers.

Score Guide

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 27–30 Correct | Excellent! You have mastered this topic. |
| 23–26 Correct | Very good! Review the rules you missed. |
| 18–22 Correct | Good start. Re-read the lesson and examples. |
| 0–17 Correct | Study the lesson again before retaking the test. |