

Negative Adverbs

Certain adverbs and adverb phrases with mostly negative sense can be, for emphasis, be placed at the beginning of a sentence and are followed by the inverted form of the verb. They are not usual in everyday spoken language; they are used in formal written English:

He is neither kind nor he is trustworthy.

Neither **is he** kind nor **is he** trustworthy.

Not only **is he** kind, but he is also trustworthy. (With 'not only', the inversion appears in the first part).

I had never heard such a weaker excuse!

Never **had I** heard such a weaker excuse!

The most important negative adverbials:

Seldom, Rarely, no sooner.... than, Scarcely ... when, Hardly ... when, Barely ... when
On no account, Under no circumstances, On no condition, Only by, Not until (till), Not only... but, Neither... nor, Never, Never before.

With 'not till', the inversion is in the second part:

Not until she got the money, **did she** buy what she wanted.

Never before **have I** seen such a beautiful scenery.

Hardly **had the train** left the station when there was an explosion.

Only combines with 'by', 'when', and 'after' and the inversion comes in the second part of the sentence:

Only by working hard **can you** succeed.

Only after posting the letter **did I** remember that I had forgotten to put on a stamp.

To make an emphatic statement out of a sentence that does not an auxiliary verb, we have to add an auxiliary verb:

I seldom hear such good news.

Seldom **do I** hear such good news.

He never slept so deeply as on vacation.

Never **did he** sleep so deeply as on vacation.

Never, rarely and seldom are most commonly used with the present perfect or past perfect. Sentences of this type contain comparatives:

Rarely **has the minister** faced with such a problem.

Seldom **has the team** given such a worse performance.

Hardly ... when/ Scarcely ... when/ Barely ... when/ No sooner ... than refer to an event which quickly follows another in the past. They are usually used with the past perfect although no sooner can be followed by the past simple.

No sooner **had I** reached the door than I realized it was closed.

No sooner **was the team** back on the pitch than it started raining.

Exercise: Rewrite the following sentences that they begin with negative adverbs:

- 1) We had never seen such a beautiful mountains.
- 2) Tony rarely goes to bed before midnight.
- 3) We seldom take such a relaxing trip.
- 4) She had rarely spoken with such sincerity.
- 5) We had scarcely arrived at the beach when it started raining.
- 6) I would never agreed to such a thing if I had known the truth!