# Inversion with negative adverbials

In formal English, and in written language in particular, we use negative adverbials at the beginning of the sentence to make it more emphatic or dramatic.

* The word order is inverted: the *negative adverbial* is placed *first*, an *auxiliary verb follows* it and the *subject* of the sentence *comes next*.
* The inversion of the subject and the verb can take place after a clause that begins with *Not until* and *Only after/if/when*.

- Time adverbials:

Never (before), rarely, seldom;

Barely/hardly/scarcely...when/before;

No sooner....than

- Only a time expression:

Only when, only after...

- Negative expressions:

Under,In no circumstances, In no way...

- Expressions starting with Not...:

Not a noun, not only.... but also, not until...

- Little with a negative meaning

**Look at the following examples:**

Never have I encountered such rudeness! (extract from a letter of complaint about the service in a restaurant)

Not only is Amanda Swift a gifted musician, but she is also good-natured and responsible. (extract from a covering letter)

No sooner had he locked the door than the phone started ringing.

Only when the last person had left did she sit down and try to relax.

Under no circumstances can you inform the staff about the imminent changes.

Not a sound could be heard in the church.

Little does Michael suspect that his daughter has been failing all her subjects at school!

**Complete the sentences**

1. (Never/I/meet) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ such well-behaved children before. They are as good as gold.  
  
2. (No sooner/my father/sit down \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to dinner than there was a knock on the door.  
  
3. (Little/he/know) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that his culinary skills are quite substandard.  
  
4. (At no time/ I/ mean) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to hurt your feelings. It was all a big misunderstanding.  
  
5. (Seldom/we/ have) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ friends over for a drink. We prefer to meet them at pubs or restaurants.   
  
6. (Not only/he/make) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ a mean cheesecake, but he also prepares homemade jam.  
  
7. Only when the situation gets out of hand \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (the government/ begin) to act.  
  
8. Not until June \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (you/can /get) all the swimming gear out of the drawers.   
  
9. (Only once/ I/climb) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ such a high mountain before.   
  
10. Her eyes were very red. (only later/I/find out)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that her fiancé had broken up with her.

ANSWERS

1. (Never/I/meet)  Never have I met such well-behaved children before. They are as good as gold.  
  
2. (No sooner/my father/sit down)  No sooner had my father sat down to dinner than there was a knock on the door.  
  
3. (Little/he/know) Little does he know that his culinary skills are quite substandard.  
  
4. (At no time/ I/ mean)  At no time did I mean to hurt your feelings. It was all a big misunderstanding.  
  
5. (Seldom/we/ have)  Seldom do we have friends over for a drink. We prefer to meet them at pubs or restaurants.  
  
6. (Not only/he/make)  Not only does he make a mean cheesecake, but he also prepares homemade jam.  
  
7. Only when the situation gets out of hand will the government begin (the government/ begin) to act  
  
8. Not until June can you get (you/can /get) all the swimming gear out of the drawers.  
  
9. (Only once/ I/climb) Only once have I climbed such a high mountain before.  
  
10. Her eyes were very red. (only later/I/find out)  Only later did I find out that her fiancé had broken up with her.