

INVERSION is the reversal of the normal order of words -the placement of a verb before its subject- like in the regular formation of questions in English, typically for rhetorical effect.

A. The adverbs away (=off), down, in, off, out, over, round, up etc. can be followed by a verb of motion + a noun subject.

- The runners went away.
 Away went the runners.
- A dozen apples fell down.
 Down fell a dozen apples.
- The cuckoo sprang out.
 Out sprang the cuckoo.
- The plane flew round and round.
 Round and round flew the plane.

⇒ **BUT; if the subject is a pronoun, it is placed before the verb.**

- They went away.
 Away they went.
- It flew round and round.
 Round and round it flew.

B. Adverb phrases introduced by prepositions down, from, in, on, out, out of, round, up, etc. can be followed by a verb indicating position. (hang, lie, sit, stand, come, go, walk).

- A little girl was sitting on the stairs.
 On the stairs was sitting a little girl.
- A great castle stood on the hill in front of us.
 On the hill in front of us stood a great castle.
- A pistol was lying under the table.
 Under the table was lying a pistol.
- A man with a gun stood in the doorway.
 In the doorway stood a man with a gun.
- A shower of stones came over the wall.
 Over the wall came a shower of stones.
- A blue parrot sat on a perch beside him.
 On a perch beside him sat a blue parrot.
- Strings of onions hung from the rafters.
 From the rafters hung strings of onions.

⇒ **Sometimes these could also be expressed by a participle and the verb 'to be'.**

- A little girl was sitting on the stairs.
 On the stairs was sitting a little girl.
 → Sitting on the stairs was a little girl.
- A great castle stood on the hill in front of us.
 On the hill in front of us stood a great castle.
 → Standing on the hill in front of us was a great castle.
- A pistol was lying under the table.
 Under the table was lying a pistol.
 → Lying under the table was a pistol.
- A man with a gun stood in the doorway.
 In the doorway stood a man with a gun.
 → Standing in the doorway was a man with a gun.
- A shower of stones came over the wall.
 Over the wall came a shower of stones.
 → Coming over the wall was a shower of stones.
- A blue parrot sat on a perch beside him.
 On a perch beside him sat a blue parrot.
 → Sitting on a perch beside him was a blue parrot.
- Strings of onions hung from the rafters.
 From the rafters hung strings of onions.
 → Hanging from the rafters were strings of onions.

C. Inversion after negative adverbials:

After the time adverbials *Never (before), Rarely, Seldom;*
Barely / Hardly / Scarcely ... when; No sooner ... than.

- We do not often have goods returned to us because they are faulty.
 Seldom do we have goods returned to us because they are faulty.
- I had just got onto the motorway when I saw two police cars following me.
 Hardly had I got onto the motorway when I saw two police cars following me.
 1. **After *Only + a time expression (Only after , Only later , Only once, Only then, Only when, Only if)***
- She bought a newspaper and some sweets at the shop on the corner. When she got to the bus stop she realized that she had been given the wrong change.
 Only when she got to the bus stop did she realize that she had been given the wrong change.
 Only after she got to the bus stop did she realize that she had been given the wrong change.
 Only then did she realize that she had been given the wrong change.

Only later did she realize that she had been given the wrong change.

- I went to the opera only once in the whole time I was in Italy.

Only once did I go to the opera in the whole time I was in Italy.

2. After Only + other prepositional phrases beginning Only by, Only in, Only with etc.

- He discovered where the birds were nesting by chance.

Only by chance did he discover where the birds were nesting.

- Mary had to work at evenings and weekends. By this way she was able to complete the report by the deadline.

Only in this way was she able to complete the report by the deadline.

3. After expressions with preposition + no, such as At no time, In no way, On no account, Under no circumstances, In no circumstances.

- They never actually broke the rules of the game.

At no time did they actually break the rules of the game.

- Passengers are not permitted to open the doors themselves.

Under no circumstances are passengers permitted to open the doors themselves.

4. After expressions with Not...., such as Not until, Not Only, and also Not + object.

- The government did not order an inquiry into the accident until August.

Not until August did the government order an inquiry into the accident.

- She hasn't written a single word since the exam started.

Not a single word has she written since the exam started.

5. After Little with a negative meaning.

- They do not know how lucky they are to live in such a wonderful house.

Little do they know how lucky they are to live in such a wonderful house.

- They didn't realize that the day would come when Michael would be famous.

- Little did they realize that the day would come when Michael would be famous.

D. Inversion after 'so + adjective... that'; 'such + be ... that' (to emphasize the extent or degree of something); 'neither ...nor...'.

- Her business was so successful that she was able to retire at the age of 50.

So successful was her business that she was able to retire at the age of 50.

- The weather conditions became so dangerous that all mountain roads were closed.

So dangerous did the weather conditions become that all mountain roads were closed.

- The play is so popular that the theatre is likely to be full every night.

So popular is the play that the theatre is likely to be full every night.

Such is the popularity of the play that the theatre is likely to be full every night.

- The punch was so powerful that his opponent fell to the canvas.
So powerful was the punch that his opponent fell to the canvas.
Such was the power of the punch that his opponent fell to the canvas.
- Tom never goes to concerts, his wife doesn't either.
Tom never goes to concerts, neither does his wife.
- Ann doesn't have any spare time, I don't have either.
Ann doesn't have any spare time, neither have I.
Ann doesn't have any spare time, nor have I.

The exercises are compiled from;

1. B.D. Graver. Advanced English Practice, 14th Ed. Oxford University Press. 2000.
2. Cook, Mary Jane. Trouble Spots of English Grammar: A Text-Workbook For ESL. Volume I. & Volume II. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1983.
3. L.G. Alexander. Longman Advanced Reference and Practice. 3rd Ed. Longman. 1993.
4. Thomson, A.J., and A.V. Martinet. 1999. A Practical English Grammar. 14th Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.