

Inversion of subject and verb

In English, the usual order of words in a sentence is subject + verb + object. Sometimes certain adverbs come at the beginning of the sentence. This order is then inverted and the verb comes before the subject.

Study the following sentences.

Scarcely had I stepped out when the telephone rang.

Hardly had I reached the station when the train departed.

No sooner had she read the telegram than she started crying.

Never have I seen such a mess.

Note that the sentences given above can also be written with normal word order.

I had scarcely stepped out when the telephone rang.

I had hardly reached the station when the train departed.

Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences, putting the adverb first and inverting the subject and verb.

1. I have seldom heard such a beautiful voice.
2. He had hardly sat down for dinner when someone knocked at the door.
3. I have never heard such utter nonsense.
4. They not only looted the shop, but also set fire to it.

Answers

1. Seldom have I heard such a beautiful voice.
2. Hardly had he sat down for dinner when someone knocked at the door.
3. Never have I heard such utter nonsense.
4. Not only did they loot the shop, but also set fire to it.