

Focus structures: fronting and inversion

We can focus attention on (or emphasize) one part of a sentence, such as the object, by moving it to front position. This is called fronting. We can use fronting, usually in formal situations, to link a sentence more closely to the preceding sentence (1) and to highlight a contrast (2).

- 1 She was coughing, sneezing and shivering. (He recognized these symptoms immediately.)
→ These symptoms he recognized immediately.
- 2 We met the Greens. (We liked Mrs Green, but we really didn't care for her husband.)
→ Mrs Green we liked, but her husband we really didn't care for.

After fronting, we often put the verb or auxiliary verb before the subject. This is called inversion. We usually use inversion with verbs describing place or movement after prepositional phrases (3) or after adverbs such as *here* and *there* (4) in front position.

- 3 I was told to sit on a chair in the middle of the room. (An old woman stood behind the chair.)
→ Behind the chair stood an old woman. • Into the room walked two men wearing sunglasses.
- 4 Here comes the bride. • There goes my bus. (NOT ~~There my bus goes.~~)

We also use inversion after negative words (*neither*, *nor*) (5), phrases beginning with *not* (6), and after adverbs such as *scarcely* or *seldom* (7) in front position.

- 5 I don't like it. Neither do my parents. Nor does anyone else that I've asked.
- 6 Not until later did we notice the broken glass. • Not only was the car old, it had no windows.
- 7 Scarcely had he sat down when the phone rang. • Seldom have I heard such nonsense.

We use inversion after *only* with prepositional phrases (8) or time expressions (9) in front position.

- 8 I've looked for it in other places. Only in Italy can you find this special kind of ice cream.
- 9 Only after the test will we know if it worked. Only then can we decide what to do next.

Inversion is also used after participles moved to front position, usually in narratives.

- 10 The bedroom was empty. Lying on the bed was a parcel. Attached to it was a small note.

15 Complete this text by adding one of these expressions in each space.

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| <i>did she</i> | <i>is it</i> | <i>it was</i> | <i>she was</i> | <i>she would</i> | <i>was something</i> |
| <i>had she</i> | <i>it is</i> | <i>here comes</i> | <i>was she</i> | <i>would she</i> | <i>was part</i> |

Only occasionally (1) find herself reading someone else's newspaper, over their shoulder, as she sat in the station waiting room. Mostly (2) just not very interested, nor (3) willing to risk getting caught. Why (4) so embarrassing to get caught doing that, she wondered to herself. It isn't against the law or anything. But facing her today (5) that really caught her attention. One of our greatest fears in modern life, the headline said, was having to speak in public. The article offered ways to develop your confidence. Seldom (6) ever had to speak to an audience, but (7) her turn to give a ten minute presentation in her Spanish class that afternoon. Not only (8) have to speak to an audience, (9) have to do it in a foreign language. She felt the room getting hotter as she leaned forward to get a closer look. Suddenly blocking her view (10) of a large black beard and the big nose of the newspaper's owner. 'Oops. Oh, (11) my train,' she said quickly, as she stood up and stumbled towards the door. Public speaking isn't scary, she thought to herself, (12) public reading that makes me really nervous.