

Lesson Plan: Fronting and Inversion

For C1+ Business and Exam English students

Level: C1-C2

Time: 50-60 minutes

Focus: Grammar, formal register

Exam link: Cambridge CAE / CPE, Use of English

Learning objective

By the end of the lesson, students can recognise and accurately produce fronted negative and formal-conditional inversion structures in written and spoken English, and understand when using them helps rather than hinders.

1. Warmer (5 minutes)

Write on the board: *"I had never seen a proposal fall apart that fast."* and *"Never had I seen a proposal fall apart that fast."* Ask students: same meaning, different sentence. What's different about the second one? How does it feel different to read? Elicit: more formal, more dramatic, sounds like the start of a speech or report.

2. Presentation (10 minutes)

Explain the pattern: a negative or limiting adverbial moves to the front of the clause, and the subject and auxiliary invert, exactly as in question formation.

- *Never have I worked with a team that adapted so fast.*
- *Rarely do clients ask for a full rewrite this late.*
- *Not only did the merger fall through, but two board members resigned.*
- *No sooner had we signed the contract than the terms changed.*
- *Under no circumstances should this figure be shared externally.*

Formal conditional inversion (no "if"): *"Had I known the deadline moved, I'd have started earlier"* instead of *"If I had known..."* Same meaning, more formal register, common in written business English.

3. Controlled practice (10 minutes)

Handout: rewrite each sentence using inversion. Answer key on the last page.

1. I have rarely seen such a clear presentation. (Rarely...)
2. We had no sooner finished the report than the client changed the brief. (No sooner...)
3. You should not discuss this figure with anyone outside the team. (Under no circumstances...)
4. If I had realised the risk earlier, I would have raised it. (Had I...)
5. The board did not only reject the proposal, it also questioned the whole strategy. (Not only...)

4. Freer practice (15 minutes)

In pairs: students describe a real (or invented) professional situation, a difficult meeting, a project that went wrong, a negotiation, using at least three inversion structures naturally. Partner listens and flags anywhere it sounds forced rather than natural, this is the key teaching point: inversion should land as deliberate emphasis, not decoration.

5. Exam-style practice (10 minutes)

Cambridge CAE/CPE Use of English Part 4 style: key-word transformation sentences. Provide 3-5 sentences with a given inversion word, students rewrite keeping the meaning unchanged. This is the exact task format students will meet in the real exam.

6. Wrap-up: the overuse trap (5 minutes)

Discuss: native speakers use this maybe once or twice in a long piece of writing, as deliberate emphasis, not a running style. Ask students to identify one moment in their own recent writing or a presentation where an inversion structure would genuinely strengthen the opening line, and one where it would just sound like showing off.

Answer key (controlled practice)

1. *Rarely have I seen such a clear presentation.*
2. *No sooner had we finished the report than the client changed the brief.*
3. *Under no circumstances should you discuss this figure with anyone outside the team.*
4. *Had I realised the risk earlier, I would have raised it.*
5. *Not only did the board reject the proposal, it also questioned the whole strategy.*