

Only: position & meaning ★★★

(★★ = Basic ★★ = Intermediate ★★★ = Advanced)

Grammar Bite

(read this)

For definitions of words in SMALL CAPITALS,
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Only is an ADVERB, and it can go in different places in the sentence (like many adverbs). We use it in both INFORMAL and FORMAL language.

INFORMAL language

Informal language can often be ambiguous:

Mike **only** wants to speak to you
(He doesn't want to marry you!)
(He doesn't want to speak to anyone else)

You can often clarify the meaning by emphasising one word more than another:

Mike only wants to **speak** to you (not marry you)
Mike only wants to speak to **you** (and no-one else)

FORMAL language

Formal language tries not to be ambiguous:

Only Mike wants to speak to you
(Nobody else wants to speak to you)
Mike wants **only** to speak to you
(He doesn't want to marry you!)
Mike wants to speak **only** to you
(He doesn't want to speak to anyone else)
Mike wants to speak to you **only**
(He doesn't want to speak to anyone else)

Worksheet

(do this)

INFORMAL language: emphasis.

Underline a word in order to express the meaning given in brackets:

- 1a I only brought sandwiches for you.
(not for anyone else)
1b I only brought sandwiches for you.
(I didn't bring a drink)
2a She only wants you to stand up.
(not run about)
2b She only wants you to stand up.
(not anyone else)
3a He only fried two eggs.
(not three eggs)
3b He only fried two eggs.
(no bacon)

FORMAL language: the position of **only**.

Insert / to show the position of only to express the meaning given in brackets:

- 4 Mr Blenkinsop will play the piano for you.
(he won't do anything else)
5 Mr Blenkinsop will play the piano for you.
(he won't play any other instrument)
6/7 Mr Blenkinsop will play the piano for you.
(he won't play for anyone else) [two positions]
.8 Mr Blenkinsop will play the piano for you.
(no-one else will play)

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¹For DEFINITIONS, go to www.grammarbites.co.uk/definitions