

N5 Grammar: あまり、だけ、しか Cheat Sheet

These three particles, あまり、だけ、しか are usually used in negative sentences.

あまり – (not) very much, (not) very

Form:

あまり + negative form of a verb

Example:

アメリカは あまり たべません。 (Amelie doesn't eat much.)
ameriwa amari tabemasen.

Mnemonic:

Imagine Amelie from the French film of the same name. She doesn't eat much, so she is slender.

あまり is almost always used in a negative sentence, but can be used in a positive sentence. If you use it this way it has a negative connotation. For example:

それは あまりです。 (That's too cruel/too much./You went too far with that.)
sorewa amaridesu.

だけ– only; just; that's all

Forms:

noun + だけ + (が) ・ (は) ・ (を)

noun + (other particles) + だけ + (other particles)*

Vる/Vた/Aい/Aかった + だけ

naな or naだった + だけ

*other particles = all particles – が, は, and を

Examples:

スコットだけ フラッシュライトを もって来ました。
sukottodake furasshuraitowo mottekimashita.
(Scott was the only person that brought a flashlight.)

わたしは きっさてんでだけ べんきょうする。(I only study at the coffee shop.)
watashiwa kissatendakede benkyousuru.

にちようびは テレビを 見るだけだ。(On Saturday, I just watched TV.)
nichiyoubiwa terebiwo mirudakeda.

Mnemonic:

Imagine you are in a dark cave and you forgot your flashlight. Scott, an Australian, shows up and says 'Dark, eh?' (dake). He is the only one with a flashlight.

You might be wondering – is there a difference between **だけで** and **でだけ** or other such formations with other particles. And yes there is, but it is very subtle. Let's take a look at the second example again:

わたしは きっさてんでだけ べんきょうする。

This sentence means you only study at the coffee shop and nowhere else, not at home, not at school, only the coffee shop. How about this sentence:

わたしは きっさてんだけで べんきょうする。

It has a slightly different meaning of something like you only study at the coffee shop, but you could study at other places, it is just that you only need to study at the coffee shop because it doesn't take that long to study or it is easy for you to study. In other words, you are not exclusively studying at the coffee shop.

しか – nothing (but...), nobody (but...), used in negative sentences

Forms:

noun + しか

noun + (に) ・ (へ) + しか

counter or numbers + しか

Examples:

たなかさんは にくしか 食べません。(Mr. Tanaka doesn't eat anything but meat.)
tanakasanwa nikushika tabemasen.

わたしは とうきょうまでしか 行けなかった。(I didn't go any farther than Tokyo.)
watashiwa toukyoumadeshka ikenakatta.

なかむらさんは ビール一本しか 飲みませんでした。
Nakamurasanwa biiruipponshika nomimasendeshita.
(Mr. Nakamura only drank one bottle of beer.)

Mnemonic:

In the Harry Potter series, they play a sport called quidditch. In this sport, there is a player whose job it is to find the golden snitch. Nobody on a quidditch team is looking for the golden snitch, but the SHIKA.

You can not use を, が or は with しか; に and へ are optionally, and all other particles are necessary and go before しか.

How does this look on the JLPT?

These particles can only be used in particular situations and have a few irregular things about them.

あまり is usually used in negative sentences

But not always! It can be used with positive sentences if the overall meaning is negative. Basically, keep in mind that あまり is used in negative situations.

しか is always used in a negative sentence

This can cause trouble in a couple of places. First, in grammar questions involving しか make sure to end the sentences with a negative. If you are not a Harry Potter fan, しか is also the word for deer in Japanese, so you can imagine an angry negative deer, while all the other deer are happy and friendly.

Take a look at this sentence:

げつようびと もくようびと きんようびしか ひまではない。
getsuyoubito mokuyoubito kinyoubishika himadewanai.
(I'm not free except on Monday, Thursday and Friday.)

Pretty confusing sentence isn't it? This is just the kind of sentence that might pop up during the listening section of the exam or in the reading section. It is very easy to quickly read this sentence and interpret it as "I'm not free only on Monday, Thursday and Friday."

Just like driving, if you see a しか (a deer) it is best to slow down and re-read it carefully.

I've missed N1 questions because I slipped up with しか.

しか doesn't just party with eni one (anyone)

しか doesn't party with は, が, or を and it optionally parties with に and へ. It does party with all the other cool particles like まで and から though.

You can remember this with the mnemonic しか doesn't just party with へ(に one (anyone). へ and に are optional, where as the main 3 (が, は, を) are not used at all. All other particles come before しか.

Keep this in mind for the grammar section of the exam, especially in the second section where you have to unscramble the sentences.

しか, だけ and かかる

かかる "to take (time)" can be used with しか, but not だけ. For example,

駅まで 5分しか かかりません。(It is only 5 minutes to the station)
Ekimade goppunshika kakarimasen.

You can't use だけ in the same sentence.

You can try to remember it as a しか (a deer) takes time to get somewhere because it has to walk.

Grammar Exercises

Rewrite the sentence like the example.

- 1a) わたしは 本 いっさつしか 読みませんでした。
b) わたしは 本 いっさつだけ 読みました。(だけ)
c) わたしは あまり 本を 読みませんでした。(あまり)

ひとつ み

- 2a) えいが 一つだけ 見ました。
b) _____ (しか)
c) _____ (あまり)

の

- 3a) あまり コーラを 飲みませんでした。
b) _____ (だけ)
c) _____ (しか)

た

- 4a) あめ 一つしか 食べませんでした。
b) _____ (だけ)
c) _____ (あまり)

Sentential Questions II

はな

5 - えいごを 話す _____ * _____ _____ いません。

ひと

- 1) はたらいて 2) 人 3) しか 4) と

はな
6 - たなかさん _____ * _____ _____ 話 しません。
1) は 2) と 3) あまり 4) なかむらさん

Answers

2b) えいが 一つしか 見ませんでした。

2c) あまり えいがを 見ませんでした。

3b) コーラ 一本だけ 飲みました。

3c) コーラ 一本しか 飲みませんでした。

4b) あめ 一つだけ 食べました。

4c) あまり あめを 食べませんでした。

5) 4 (2 4 3 1) First, since the verb はなす appears before the blanks we need to look for something that can go after it. しか and はたらいて can't. と can in some situations, but ひと can as well. Let's try ひと first. Then, you can put はたらいて at the end because it goes with いません. That only leaves you with と and しか.

We know that particles have to go before しか so と goes in the 2nd blank while しか goes in the 3rd blank. The final sentence is:

えいごを はなす ひととしか はたらいていません。
eigowo hanasu hitotoshika hataraitemasen.
(I work with nobody but an English speaking person.)

6) 4 (1 4 2 3) This is really a question of where あまり can go in a sentence. Does it go toward the end with the verb? Or can it go toward the front? The answer is it goes toward the end of the sentence with the negative verb. The final sentence is:

たなかさんは なかむらさんと あまり 話しません。
Tanakasanwa nakamurasanto amari hanashimasen.
(Mr. Tanaka doesn't talk to Mr. Nakamura very much.)