だけ・しか〜ない

だけ

しか

Only This Much

Keep the quantity. Change the construction. Read the context.

A focused workbook on limiting quantities and choices with だけ and しか plus a negative predicate. Learn to preserve the facts when rewriting, recognize what is limited, and separate a small amount from the speaker's feelings. This book does not cover するしかない, だけあって, or complex negative scope.

Post-beginner / core N4; basic counters and negative forms required

32 practice tasks | Explained answers | English guidance

LEARN. PRACTICE. UNDERSTAND.

Your route through this book

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Before you begin

Post-beginner / core N4; basic counters and negative forms required. Levels are approximate teaching guidance, not an official JLPT syllabus or a proficiency guarantee.

Read, try, compare, retry

Read one lesson, study the Japanese examples and English meanings, then complete the matching practice. Write short answers on the lines and longer responses in a notebook. Check the reason as well as the answer. Return to the lesson when you cannot explain your choice.

How to use the answers

Open tasks have model answers, not the only possible wording. Accept natural alternatives that preserve the requested meaning and viewpoint. For each task, check both the answer and your reason. The final practice set is a self-check: try it without notes, then review the categories you missed.

Reading and use

This PDF is designed for zoomed reading and printing. Japanese examples use normal spelling; vocabulary notes support key words. No recorded audio or personal feedback is included. You may keep and use your downloaded files for personal study without a time limit. Printing for your own study is allowed. Sharing, redistribution, and resale are not permitted. © 2026 Junichiro Japanese.

One quantity, two constructions

Identify the stated amount before interpreting the speaker's attitude.

Start with the facts

Picture a tray with exactly three cookies. You can report that limited amount with either construction below. The negative ending in the しか sentence does not erase those three cookies: it denies anything beyond the stated limit.

A useful first contrast

Quantity + だけ can simply restrict the amount. Quantity + しか with a negative predicate draws attention to the absence of anything more. In a shortage context, the second pattern often makes the small amount more prominent. Neither pattern tells you, on its own, whether the speaker is pleased or disappointed.

What a rewrite preserves

In this book, a rewrite keeps the object, quantity, action and time. It need not preserve every conversational implication. Read the requested construction rather than guessing that one sentence must always be more natural.

クッキーが三枚だけあります。

There are only three cookies.

クッキーが三枚しかありません。

There are only three cookies (no more than those three).

三枚あれば十分です。

Three are enough.

DECISION / First ask: how many are actually there? Then ask whether the context makes that amount enough.

WORDS / 枚（まい） counter for flat items; 十分（じゅうぶん） enough; 三枚（さんまい） three flat items

Build the negative partner

Match しか to the correct negative form and time.

The pair belongs together

For the basic limiting construction taught here, しか requires a negative predicate. Use ありません for things, いません for people and animals, and the negative form of the relevant action verb. Do not add ない after an already polite verb.

Keep the time

A past action remains past when you rewrite it: 読みました becomes 読みませんでした. A plain past form such as 読んだ becomes 読まなかった. Changing the ending to a non-past negative would change the time as well as the construction.

Do not confuse form with the facts

The grammatical negative rejects alternatives beyond the limit. It does not mean the limited action failed to happen. 一冊しか読みませんでした says that the person read one book, not zero.

今日は客が一人しかいません。

There is only one customer today.

昨日は本を一冊しか読みませんでした。

Yesterday I read only one book.

今は小銭しかない。

Right now I have only coins.

DECISION / Circle both しか and its negative ending. Check that the ending still matches the original time.

WORDS / 客（きゃく） customer; 小銭（こぜに） coins/small change; 読む（よむ） read; 一冊（いっさつ） one book

Find the quantity

Review: 01-02. Answer the prompt and give a short reason.

Q001 Read: りんごが二つしかありません。 How many apples are there: zero, two, or more than two? Translate the sentence.

Q002 Rewrite with しか and a polite negative. Keep the present quantity:
ペンが三本だけあります。 (There are only three pens.)

Q003 Rewrite with だけ and います: 教室には学生が四人しかいません。 (There are only four students in the classroom.)

Q004 Repair the sentence to mean 'I bought only one notebook yesterday.' Keep しか:
昨日、ノートを一冊しか買いました。

Answers Q001-Q008

Q001 Two. There are only two apples.

しか plus ありません excludes an amount beyond two; it does not negate the presence of the two apples.

Q002 ペンが三本しかありません。

三本 stays unchanged. The existence predicate becomes ありません, the required negative partner of this basic しか pattern.

Q003 教室には学生が四人だけいます。

The people and count remain four students. います is affirmative; this controlled rewrite preserves the quantity, not every implication.

Q004 昨日、ノートを一冊しか買いませんでした。

しか needs the negative partner. Use past negative 買いませんでした so that yesterday's completed purchase remains past.

Q005 今は百円しかない。

The plain negative of ある is ない, not あらない. The amount and present time remain unchanged.

Q006 昨日は五分だけ勉強しました。

The study occurred for five minutes. Preserve the past with しました rather than します.

Q007 The limit 二人しか is correct, but the predicate should be 来ませんでした:
昨日、二人しか来ませんでした。

The original reports past arrivals. A non-past negative does not preserve that report.

Q008 ここには犬が一匹しかいません。

An animal takes います, whose negative is いません. One dog is present; alternatives beyond that number are excluded.

This answer excerpt includes Q005-Q008; those tasks are not shown in this sample.

Keep the distinction

Locate the limit: quantity, category, place or recipient.

For the basic しか pattern, pair it with a matching negative predicate.

Preserve action, time, quantity and necessary particles in controlled rewrites.

Do not translate grammatical negative as zero quantity.

Do not assign fixed happy/sad emotions to だけ and しか.

だけ can appear with a negative predicate; such sentences need their own scope analysis.

Retry Q025-Q032 without notes. Mark the fact and the construction separately; treat open answers as models, not unique strings.

Make it yours

Choose three tasks you found difficult. Change the people, objects or setting, then write a new example that follows the same distinction. Revisit it the next day and explain the choice without looking at the answer.