

しか～ない

only / nothing but

Romaji: **shika nai**

しか～ない means “only”, and it always comes with a negative verb — that pairing is not optional, it is the pattern. 千円しかありません is “I only have a thousand yen.” What makes it different from だけ is attitude: しか～ない frames the amount as insufficient or disappointing, where だけ is neutral. It also replaces は, が and を rather than stacking with them, so 水だけ飲む becomes 水しか飲まない, never ×水をしか飲まない.

構文 CONSTRUCTION

Noun + しか + negative verb

千円しか持っていません。 — I only have a thousand yen on me.

It replaces は / が / を (but keeps に, で, から)

日本語しか話せません。 — I can only speak Japanese.

Verb (dictionary form) + しかない — “there’s nothing to do but”

もう待つしかない。 — There’s nothing left to do but wait.

With other particles, しか follows them: ～にしか ・ ～でしか

ここでしか買えません。 — You can only buy it here.

例文 EXAMPLES

1 ^{さいふ} 財布に ^{ひゃくえん} 百 ^{はい} 円しか入っていません。

There's only a hundred yen in my wallet.

2 ^{きのう} 昨日は ^{さんじかん} 三時間 ^ね しか寝ていない。

I only got three hours' sleep last night.

3 こうなったら、やるしかない。

Now that it's come to this, there's nothing to do but go for it.

注意点 NUANCES

- ▶ The negative is compulsory. ×千円しかあります is not a sentence — the “only” meaning lives in the combination of しか and ない, not in しか alone.
- ▶ しか～ない sounds like a complaint; だけ does not. 一時間だけ寝た is a statement of fact, 一時間しか寝ていない is a grumble about being tired.
- ▶ It swallows は, が and を, but sits after に, で, と and から: 彼にしか言っていない, 東京でしか売っていない.
- ▶ Verb + しかない is a fixed idiom meaning “have no choice but to”, and it is extremely common in spoken Japanese: やるしかない, 諦めるしかない.

やってみよう YOUR TURN

Complain about three things you don't have enough of today — time, money, sleep — each with しか～ない. Then say what there is nothing to do but do, using verb + しかない.