

English Grammar – Word Order

In English, word order is important, and changing it usually changes the meaning of a phrase. Also, to make questions, we frequently change the word order. Here are some examples:

1. a) Chocolate cake Meaning: Cake which contains chocolate.
b) Cake chocolate Meaning: Chocolate which is used to put on or in cakes.

2. a) She nearly failed all her tests. Meaning: She passed all of her tests, but not easily.
b) She failed nearly all her tests. Meaning: She passed some of here tests, but failed most of them.

3. Consider the phrase “**I am a child**”. Let’s insert the word “**only**” into the phrase. The position of the extra word will define the meaning of the phrase:

- a) **Only** I am a child. Meaning: The other people with me are not children.
- b) I am **only** a child. Meaning: Treat me with care, I am very young.
- c) I am an **only** child. Meaning: I don’t have siblings.

In each case, the word immediately after the word “only” defines the meaning of the phrase.

Exercise 1. Let’s put the word “**only**” into the phrase “**John helped Mary**”. Describe the meanings of the following phrases.

1. **Only** John helped Mary. _____
2. John **only** helped Mary. _____
3. John helped **only** Mary. _____

Exercise 2. Do a similar thing with “**I lost my shirt**” and “**only**”.

1. **Only** I lost my shirt. _____
2. I **only** lost my shirt. _____
3. I lost **only** my shirt. _____
4. I lost my **only** shirt. _____