

Just and only

“Only” and “just” are both adverbs which can be used in similar ways.

“Just” has several possible definitions:

1) Recently:

Be careful! I've *just* washed the floor, and it's still wet. = I washed the floor a few minutes ago.

He's *just* finished a big project. = he finished the project very recently.

When you use just as in recently, you can't replace it with only as it changes the meaning:

I *just* washed the floor. = a few minutes ago.

I *only* washed the floor. = I didn't wash anything else.

2) Only

I have *just* one sister. = I have only one sister.

I thought you were hungry, but you ate *just* half of your sandwich. = you ate only half of your sandwich, and no more.

The word “only” can be replaced with “just” in many cases when we are using it to say without others, no more than:

Only two students came to class on the day before Christmas. = just two students came to class on the day before Christmas.

Just two students came to class on the day before Christmas.

With the 3rd conditional you can use “just” if you change the structure a little bit:

If *only* I had studied harder, I would've passed the test. = If I had *just* studied harder, I would've passed the test.

The other thing to take care of is word order. When you use “just,” the word order matters:

Rosy *just* ate two pieces of cake. = Rosy recently ate two pieces of pizza

Rosy ate *just* two pieces of cake. = Rosy ate only two pieces, not 3 or 4.