

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

UNIQUE OR ONLY

1. **Unique** is an adjective meaning **one of a kind**.

A person, place or thing is **unique**¹ when there are no other examples like it.

Unique emphasizes **different**, (and, typically, **better**) than **all the others in the same category**. People of genius, extraordinary talent, or exceptional abilities are very often called **unique**.

Example:

Mozart was **unique**. He composed his first symphony at the age of 5.

Unique can also be used to describe:

- experiences
- opportunities

Examples:

Studying English for lawyers with colleagues as both fellow-students and instructor is a **unique experience** for me.

John tried hard to convince the investors of the **unique opportunity** he was offering them to get in on the ground floor of his new company.

2. **Only** describes the **numerical singularity**² of a person, place, or thing.

Examples:

He is **an only child**. (He has no brothers and sisters.)

This is the **only chance** I have had to spend studying English in a concentrated, uninterrupted fashion. At work, my lessons are always interrupted by phone calls and other distractions.

He is **the only person** in the office who rides a bike to work. Everyone else drives or takes a bus.

¹ Pronounce this word: *you-**neek***. Stress the second syllable; **neek** rhymes with *week*.

² The adjective **only** has the same root as the number **one**.

SUMMARY:

- **Unique** is **qualitative**.
- **Only** is **quantitative**.