

-(이)나마

even if only, at least

Marks something as less than you wanted but better than nothing. The most formal item on this level, and the one you are most likely to meet in writing rather than speech.

HOW TO ATTACH IT

Ends in a consonant	-이나마	조금이나마
Ends in a vowel	-나마	잠시나마
Typical partners	조금, 잠시, 이것	이것이나마
Register	formal, modest	donations, apologies, prefaces
Not for	generous amounts	많이나마 does not work
Neutral version	(이)라도	물이라도 드세요

WHEN TO USE IT

The consonant rule is the familiar one: a noun ending in a consonant takes 이나마, one ending in a vowel takes 나마. 조금이나마, 잠시나마.

The meaning always carries a note of insufficiency. 조금이나마 도움이 되었으면 좋겠습니다 — I hope it helped, even if only a little. Saying 조금 도움이 되었으면 loses that acknowledgement that a little is not much.

Because of this it belongs to modest and formal speech: donations, condolences, apologies, prefaces. It is common in writing and in careful spoken Korean, and rare among friends.

It cannot mark something generous. Attaching it to a large or satisfying amount contradicts the particle itself.

IN USE

- 1 조금이나마 도움이 되었으면 좋겠습니다.
I hope it has been of some help, however small.
- 2 잠시나마 함께해서 즐거웠습니다.
It was a pleasure to be together, brief though it was.
- 3 이것이나마 받아 주시면 감사하겠습니다.
I would be grateful if you would accept this, modest as it is.
- 4 늦게나마 소식을 전해 드립니다.
I'm passing on the news, late though it is.
- 5 작은 정성이나마 보태고 싶었습니다.
I wanted to contribute, however little.

6 사진으로나마 볼 수 있어서 다행이에요.

I'm glad I could at least see it in a photo.

COMPARED WITH

(이)라도

Both mean "at least this," but (이)라도 is neutral and everyday. (이)나마 adds regret that it is not more, and belongs to formal speech.

물이라도 드세요. (have some water at least) / 조금이나마 도움이 되길. (may it help, however little)

(이)나

Similar shape, opposite feeling. After a number, (이)나 says the amount is more than expected; (이)나마 says it falls short.

세 시간이나 잤어요. (a whole three hours) / 잠시나마 쉬었어요. (I rested, if only briefly)

밖에

Both point at insufficiency, but 밖에 complains while (이)나마 is grateful for what there was.

세 시간밖에 못 잤어요. (only three hours) / 잠시나마 잘 수 있었어요. (at least I got a little sleep)

WATCH OUT

X 잠시이나마 함께해서 즐거웠습니다.

O 잠시나마 함께해서 즐거웠습니다.

잠시 ends in a vowel, so it takes 나마 alone. 이나마 goes after a consonant, as in 조금이나마.

X 많이나마 도움이 되었으면 좋겠습니다.

O 조금이나마 도움이 되었으면 좋겠습니다.

The particle exists to mark a shortfall. Attached to a generous amount it contradicts itself.

X 야, 이것이나마 먹어.

O 야, 이거라도 먹어.

(이)나마 is formal and modest. Among friends, (이)라도 is the natural choice.