

Just So Stories from MICASE¹

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There are 89 hits (from 59 different transcripts) for just so in the MICASE data. A few do not, in fact, refer to just so as a structural unit, one of them being;

the apple was just, so to speak, the last apple that broke the problem's back.

Then there are six examples of the phrase "it just so happens", as in:

and it just so happens that they all lined up together, so we don't really have any recombinants per se here.

And, as might be expected, there are quite a lot (around 30) instances of just so as an adjectival intensifier:

it's the starting point that is just so hard for me

the raccoon population is just so high

i mean he's just so obnoxious such a jerk

These intensifier uses are usually expressed with an emphatic, dramatic intonation and the adjectives tend to be polarized toward the extremes.

However, the main use of just so (46 instances, or just over 50% of the total) turns out to be very different. Here are seven examples:

- 1) there's a typo. just so you know
- 2) i'm gonna put the head-pointer in just so i can show you..
- 3) i'll show you some interesting constructions. just so you can get used to looking at these
- 4) I'm gonna tell you the mean first just so you don't get shocked when you see <laugh> the grades are
- 5) don't write this down but just so you know what the title is...

¹ Rudyard Kipling published a collection of "Just so" children's stories in 1902; one of the best known is "How the camel got his hump."

6) so this is the same as this, right? just so I'm not going out of my mind

7) ...the log file for the H-L-M run just so we have a record...

In these uses of just so the intonation tends to be low-key and the “just” may often be reduced to “jss”. As can be seen from the above examples, these “just so” phrases often function to introduce politely-expressed after-thoughts of various kinds, such as reminders, clarifications or explanations. As such, these phrases beginning with just so are a useful device for instructors and presenters to offer additional information in a way that is both respectful of their listeners and yet does not break into the main line of argument.

Can you match up the two halves of these utterances so they make better sense?

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|---|---|
| 1. Perhaps you can send me a list | a. just so I can sort them out for next class |
| 2. I'll give you a rough draft | b. just so you can start without me |
| 3. Lemme number the steps here | c. just so you can be thinking about it |
| 4. I'll give you the question now | d. just so you know I actually wrote it up |
| 5. I expect to be late for the next meeting | e. just so I know who is coming |
| 6. Please email me your suggested topics | f. just so you can see the sequence clearly |

Suggested answers

1-e; 2-d; 3-f; 4-c; 5-b; 6-a