HSK 4 Grammar 27: Comparing Similar Adverbs

HSK 4 本来/原来, 常常/往往, 刚/刚才 pairs, taught from the reviewed topic handout; classroom examples, not official exam items.

Same translation, different jobs

> Two “originally”s, two “often”s, two “just”s — each pair hides one clean difference, and finding it ends the confusion.

- The U-turn vs the lightbulb.
- The count vs the law.
- The adverb vs the time noun.

本来 vs 原来

本来 — the plan that changed

我本来要去上海，但是去不了了。(Wǒ běnlái yào qù Shànghǎi, dànshì qù bu liǎo le.) — I was originally going to Shanghai, but then I couldn't.

原来 — the discovery

原来你是老师啊！(Yuánlái nǐ shì lǎoshī a!) — Oh, so you're a teacher!

Try it: the changed plan

1. **The situation** You wanted piano; life handed you a guitar.
2. **Name the U-turn** 我本来想学钢琴 (wǒ běnlái xiǎng xué gāngqín).
3. **Land the change** 但是后来学了吉他 (dànshì hòulái xué le jítā).
4. **Check** A plan, a 但是, a different outcome — 本来's whole shape.

Decision

I originally wanted piano, but ended up with guitar.

常常 vs 往往: the future test

Word	Kind	In the future?
常常	A frequency count	Yes — 我以后会常常运动 ✓
往往	A law-like tendency	No — a tendency cannot be a plan

Use the evidence

常常 can shrink to 常 (常去); 往往 cannot drop a 往.

刚 vs 刚才: adverb vs time noun

刚 — the adverb

我刚回来。(Wǒ gāng huílái.) — I just got back.

Glued to the verb; before an adjective only 刚 works: 天刚晴.

刚才 — the time noun

你刚才去哪儿了？(Nǐ gāngcái qù nǎr le?) — Where did you go just now?

Stands alone (刚才呢？) and modifies nouns: 刚才的事.

Quick check

Your turn

"I'll often call you from now on" takes which word?

A. 往往
B. 常常

Check yourself

Your turn

Which can come before 的 + noun – 刚 or 刚才?

A. 刚
B. 刚才