HSK 5 Grammar 24: Comparing similar adverbs

HSK 5 常常 and 经常, taught from the reviewed topic handout; classroom examples, not official exam items.

Two words for ‘often’

Job	**常常**	**经常**
adverb before a verb	他常常坐地铁去上班。	我们经常在会议室讨论。
adjective + 的 + noun	not possible: 常常的事	经常的事 · 经常的习惯
not often	不常	不经常

Use the evidence

Before a verb the two overlap and usually swap freely. Before 的 and a noun, only 经常 works.

Habit as a noun, habit as an action

Describing a noun — 经常的

午饭后喝茶是她经常的习惯。

Describing an action — either adverb

她午饭后常常喝茶。

她午饭后经常喝茶。

Where 不 goes changes the meaning

1. **Negate 'often'** 他不常吃早饭。He does not often eat breakfast.
2. **Negate the verb** 他常常不吃早饭。He often skips breakfast.
3. **Same with 经常**他经常不吃早饭。· 他不经常熬夜，这个星期例外。

Decision

Decide whether you are negating 'often' or negating the verb.

Your turn: a regular problem

Your turn

Traffic jams are a regular problem in this city. Which sentence is natural?

A. 堵车是这座城市常常的问题。
B. 堵车是这座城市经常的问题。
C. 堵车是这座城市不常常的问题。

Your turn: half her mornings

Your turn

About half of Mei's mornings include breakfast and half do not. Skipping it is frequent. Which sentence fits?

A. 梅不常吃早饭。
B. 梅常常不吃早饭。
C. 梅不常常吃早饭。

Answers: often

1. **A regular problem** 堵车是这座城市经常的问题。
2. **Frequent skipping** 梅常常不吃早饭。
3. **Grandpa's walk** 晚饭后散步是爷爷经常的事。
4. **Not often at the café** 林不常在咖啡馆学习。

Decision

Before a verb, either adverb; before 的 and a noun, 经常; for 'not often', 不常 or 不经常.

Check yourself

Your turn

Working overtime is a regular thing at this company, but she herself does not often stay late. Which pair is natural?

A. 加班是这家公司经常的事，不过她不常留到很晚。
B. 加班是这家公司常常的事，不过她不常常留到很晚。
C. 加班是这家公司经常的事，不过她常常不留到很晚。