

Conjunctions

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

或者 — “or” (in statements)

Use **或者** to lay out alternatives in a **statement** — “either ... or.” It tells, it doesn’t ask: “coffee or tea, both fine.” The moment you want the listener to *choose*, you must switch to **还是** (the last point in this topic) — this is the single most-tested “or” trap in Chinese.

Structure: Possibility 1 + 或者 + Possibility 2

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 喝 |hē|drink / 咖啡 |kā fēi|coffee / 或者 |huò zhě|or / 茶 |chá|tea / , 都 |dōu|either / 行 |xíng|is fine / 。 }

Coffee or tea — either’s fine for me.

{zh: 星期六 |xīng qī liù|Saturday / 或者 |huò zhě|or / 星期天 |xīng qī tiān|Sunday / , 都 |dōu|both / 可以 |kě yǐ|work / 。 }

Saturday or Sunday both work.

Remember: **或者** = “or” when you tell; **还是** = “or” when you ask. A statement (“either is fine”) takes 或者; a question (“which one?”) takes 还是.

Watch out

- It often closes with 都行 / 都可以 (“either one is fine”).

那 / 那么 — “then, in that case”

那 (or the fuller **那么**) picks up what was just said and draws a suggestion or conclusion from it — “then, so, in that case.” It opens your reply, reacting to the other person’s remark. (It’s the same **那** as “that” — literally “*that* being so, ...”.)

Structure: Situation , 那 (么) + Suggestion / Decision

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 不 |bù|won’t / 听 |tīng|listen / , 那 |nà|then / 我 |wǒ|I / 应该 |yīng gāi|should / 怎么办 |zěn me bàn|do what / ? }

He won’t listen — so what should I do?

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 不 |bù|don’t / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|like / 这个 |zhè ge|this one / , 那 |nà|then / 我们 |wǒ men|we / 换 |huàn|swap / 一个 |yí ge|for another / 。 }

You don’t like this one — then let’s swap it.

Remember: 那 (么) = “that being so...” — it *reacts and suggests* in conversation. It is **not** 所以 (“therefore”), which states a cause→effect inside one thought.

Watch out

- A bare 那 is the most natural in speech; 那么 sounds a touch more formal.

跟 ... (一起) + 动词 — “with (someone)”

Before the verb, **跟** marks the person you do something **with** — “(together) with.” It frequently teams up with 一起 (“together”). 跟 also means “to follow / heel,” which is why it leans toward doing things *alongside* someone.

Structure: Subject + 跟 + Person + (一起) + Verb

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 要 |yào|want to / 跟 |gēn|with / 我 |wǒ|me / 一起 |yì qǐ|together / 去 |qù|go / 吗 |ma / ? }

Do you want to come with me?

{zh: 跟 |gēn|after / 我 |wǒ|me / 读 |dú|read / 。 }

Read after me.

Remember: 跟 literally “to follow” — so 跟我读 is “read *after* me.” The “with” phrase always sits **before** the verb: 跟你见面 ✓, never 见面你.

Watch out

- 跟 ≈ 和 for plain “with,” but only 跟 carries the “follow” sense (跟我来, “come with / after me”).

A + 还是 + B? — “or” (in questions)

When you ask someone to **choose** between options, use **还是** — never 或者. 还是 turns the sentence into an either/or question, and the asker is waiting for you to pick one.

Structure: (Subject + Verb +) A + 还是 + B + ?

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 要 |yào|want / 喝 |hē|drink / 茶 |chá|tea / 还是 |hái shì|or / 咖啡 |kā fēi|coffee / ? }

Do you want tea or coffee?

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 是 |shì|is / 美国人 |Měi guó rén|American / 还是 |hái shì|or / 英国人 |Yīng guó rén|British / ? }

Is he American or British?

Remember: Questions → 还是; statements → 或者. This is the pair to keep glued together — see 或者 at the top of this topic.

Watch out

- Don't repeat 是 before B: 是水还是酒 ✓, not 是水还是是酒.