

Conditional Statements

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

只要…就…—”as long as”

只要…就… sets out a **sufficient condition** —”as long as A, (then) B.” A on its own is **enough** to trigger B, even if it isn’t the *only* route to B. Read 只要 as ”you only need…” and 就 as ”…then, right away.”

Structure: 只要 + Condition , 就 + Result

{zh: 只要 |zhǐ yào|as long as / 你 |nǐ|you / 努力 |nǔ lì|hard / 学习 |xué xí|study / , 就 |jiù|then / 会 |huì|will / 有 |yǒu|make / 进步 |jìn bù|progress / 。 }

As long as you study hard, you’ll make progress.

{zh: 只要 |zhǐ yào|whenever / 下雨 |xià yǔ|it rains / , 她 |tā|she / 就 |jiù|then / 心情 |xīn qíng|mood / 不好 |bù hǎo|bad / 。 }

Whenever it rains, she’s in a bad mood.

Remember: 只要 = ”you only NEED…” (enough, maybe one of several ways); 只有 = ”ONLY if…” (the sole way). 只要 pairs with 就; 只有 pairs with 才. The 一 vs the 才 is the tell —see 只有 below.

Watch out

- 只要 reaches for 就 (”then, immediately”); swapping in 才 quietly changes the meaning to ”only if.”

……, 才……—”only then, only after”

才 between two clauses says the second happened **only after** / **only because of** the first —usually after real time, money, or effort was spent. English: ”not until …, only after ….”

Structure: Condition , 才 + Result

{zh: 那本书 |nà běn shū|that book / 我 |wǒ|I / 看 |kàn|read / 了 |le / 两遍 |liǎng biàn|twice / 才 |cái|only then / 看懂 |kàn dǒng|understood it / 。 }

I only understood that book after reading it twice.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 做完 |zuò wán|finished / 了 |le / 功课 |gōng kè|homework / 才 |cái|only then / 睡觉 |shuì jiào|went to bed / 。 }

She didn’t go to bed until she’d finished her homework.

Remember: 才 spotlights ”how much it took” before the result came —two readings, lots of effort, a late hour. The result clause usually ends in a result complement (看懂, 买到), reporting what was finally achieved.

Watch out

- This 才 takes **no** 了 on its verb —the effort, not a tidy completion, is the point.

只有…才…—”only if”

只有…才… names the **one essential condition** —”only if A (can) B happen.” No A, no B, full stop. The 才 is very often followed by 能.

Structure: 只有 + Condition , 才 (能) + Result

{zh: 只有 |zhǐ yǒu|only if / 努力 |nǔ lì|you work hard / , 才 |cái|only then / 能 |néng|can / 做好 |zuò hǎo|do well / 工作 |gōng zuò|the job / 。 }

Only by working hard can you do the job well.

{zh: 只有 |zhǐ yǒu|only if / 多 |duō|more / 吃饭 |chī fàn|you eat / , 才 |cái|only then / 能 |néng|can / 长高 |zhǎng gāo|grow tall / 。 }

Only if you eat more will you grow tall.

Remember: 只有 = the **ONLY door** (a *necessary* condition) → pairs with 才; **只要** = **ANY door that works** (a *sufficient* condition) → pairs with 就. Lock the pairs together: 只有…才…, 只要…就….

Watch out

- 才 here very often carries 能: 只有…才能….