

Comparing similar adverbs

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

才 vs 就—”late / hard” vs ”early / easy”

These two adverbs are a matched pair pulling in **opposite directions**. Both sit before the verb after a time or condition, but **才** says something happened **later or with more effort than expected** (often a touch impatient), while **就** says it happened **sooner or more easily than expected**.

{zh: 老板 |lǎo bǎn|the boss / 十一点 |shí yī diǎn|eleven / 才 |cái|not until / 到 |dào|arrived / 。 }

The boss didn't get in until eleven.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 六点 |liù diǎn|six / 就 |jiù|already / 到 |dào|arrived / 了 |le / 。 }

He was already here by six.

Remember: 才 drags late (no 了); 就 jumps early (+ 了). A neat tell: the 了 lines up with 就 (“already happened, 就到了”) and avoids 才 (“late, nothing tidily completed, 才到”).

Watch out

- 才 = slower / later / harder than expected (sometimes annoyed); 就 = faster / earlier / easier.
- The verb after 才 takes **no 了**; 就 in the “already” sense usually **does**.

刚 vs 刚才—adverb vs time word

Same “just,” two different word-classes. **刚** is an **adverb** (“just,” sitting right before the verb); **刚才** is a **time noun** (“a moment ago,” roughly the last 1–30 minutes) that can stand on its own and even modify a noun.

{zh: 老板 |lǎo bǎn|the boss / 刚 |gāng|just / 走 |zǒu|left / 。 }

The boss just left.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 刚才 |gāng cái|just now / 说 |shuō|said / 什么 |shén me|what / 了 |le / ? }

What did you just say?

Remember: 刚 = **adverb, glued to the verb (刚到)**; 刚才 = **noun, free-standing (刚才的事, “the thing just now”)**. 刚 often skips 了 when the verb already carries a result; 刚才 is firmly past and pairs with 了.

Watch out

- Before an **adjective**, only 刚 / 刚刚 works: 天刚晴 (“the sky just cleared”) —never 刚才晴.

有点 vs 一点—”a bit too” vs ”a little (more)”

Both translate as ”a bit,” but they sit on **opposite sides** of the adjective and carry opposite moods. **有点 (儿)** goes **before** an adjective with a hint of **complaint** (”a bit too …”); **一点 (儿)** goes **after** an adjective to mark a small **amount or degree** (in comparisons or requests).

{zh: 今天 |jīn tiān|today / 我 |wǒ|I'm / 有点 |yǒu diǎn|a bit / 累 |lèi|tired / 。 }

I'm a bit tired today.

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 说 |shuō|speak / 慢 |màn|slowly / 一点 |yì diǎn|a little / 。 }

Please speak a little more slowly.

Remember: **有点 + Adj = a grumble before** (”a bit *too* tired”); **Adj + 一点 = a measured amount after** (”a little slower”). Position tells you the mood: before = complaint, after = neutral nudge.

Watch out

- **一点 + Noun = ”a little (of)”**: 一点水, 一点钱—有点 can't do this.
- **一点也不 / 一点也没 = ”not at all”**: 一点也不辣.

再 vs 又—future vs past ”again”

Both mean ”again,” but they split cleanly on **time**: **再** is ”again” for something **not yet done** (a future or intended repeat); **又** is ”again” for something that **has already happened**.

{zh: 欢迎 |huān yíng|welcome / 再 |zài|again / 来 |lái|come / ! }

Come again!

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 又 |yòu|again / 迟到 |chí dào|late / 了 |le / 。 }

You're late again.

Remember: **再** looks forward (**plan/intend, no 了**); **又** looks back (**already repeated, usually + 了**). 欢迎再来 (please come again) vs 你又来了 (here you are again). The 了 sides with 又.

Watch out

- **再** also means ”another” (再来一个) and ”(do A) then (B)” (先…再…); **又** also stacks qualities (又高又帅).