

Comparing similar conjunctions

HSK 3 Grammar

Use the examples with their context and limits. Recall a sentence before reading the model. Original teaching additions accompany examples adapted from Chinese Grammar Wiki (AllSet Learning, CC BY-NC-SA); see the course reference provenance.

还是 vs 或者 (or: question vs statement)

■ An embedded question still asks for a choice

- You do not know which drink a guest prefers.
- 我不知道他喝茶还是咖啡。** – 还是 keeps the alternative choice inside the statement of uncertainty.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is **还是 vs 或者 (or: question vs statement)**. Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

你喝茶还是咖啡?

nǐ hē chá hái shì kā fēi

Word guide: 你 – you; 喝 – drink; 茶 – tea; 还是 – or; 咖啡 – coffee.

■ Read examples in context

茶或者咖啡都行。

chá huò zhě kā fēi dōu xíng

Word guide: 茶 – tea; 或者 – or; 咖啡 – coffee; 都 – both; 行 – fine.

- In the opening example, **我不知道他喝茶还是咖啡。**: 还是 keeps the alternative choice inside the statement of uncertainty.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- Compare 茶或者咖啡都行, a statement offering acceptable options.
- Choose 还是 for an alternative question, including an embedded one, rather than using the whole sentence's final punctuation alone.

■ Use the distinction

- 还是 keeps the alternative choice inside the statement of uncertainty.
- Compare 茶或者咖啡都行, a statement offering acceptable options. Choose 还是 for an alternative question, including an embedded one, rather than using the whole sentence's final punctuation alone.

■ Try it with help closed

You do not know which drink a guest prefers. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 我不知道他喝茶还是咖啡。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Compare 茶或者咖啡都行, a statement offering acceptable options.
- Choose 还是 for an alternative question, including an embedded one, rather than using the whole sentence's final punctuation alone.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.