

HSK 4 Grammar

English edition

Contents

1 Adjectives

1.1 + — “the whole, entire”

in front of a noun scoops up “the whole, entire” thing in one sweep. It bonds to a small set of “whole-able” nouns — (body), (family), (country), (world), (school), (year) — and calls for a in the predicate. The one rule to burn in: **takes no**.

Structure: + Noun + + Predicate

{zh: |wǒ men|our / |quán jiā|whole family / |dōu|all / |qù guo|have been to / |Běi jīng|Beijing / 。 }

Our whole family has been to Beijing.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |dì fang|place / |quán nián|all year / |dōu / |hěn|very / |rè|hot / 。 }

This place is hot all year round.

Remember: = the whole thing in one sweep — and never (✓, ×). It almost always sends a downstream to echo the “all.”

Watch out

- It attaches only to “whole” nouns (, , , ...).
- Advanced flip: = “none go at all”; = “not all go” — where sits changes everything.

1.2 + — “... to death, extremely”

after an adjective cranks it to the limit — “... to death, extremely.” It’s the exact match of English “*scared to death*,” “*bored to death*”: vivid, casual, and slanted toward **unpleasant** feelings. The subject is optional.

Structure: (Subject +) Adjective +

{zh: |wǒ|I’m / |è|hungry / |sǐ le|to death / ! }

I’m starving!

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |lèi|tired / |sǐ le|to death / ! }

I’m exhausted today!

{zh: |zhè jiàn|this / |yī fu|outfit / |chǒu|ugly / |sǐ le|to death / 。 }

This outfit is hideous.

Remember: = English “...to death” (= “dead tired”). It’s the drama-queen cousin of — louder, more informal, mostly for misery (, , ,) — and it attaches **bare**, no .

Watch out

- Reach for it when the feeling is bad and you want to exaggerate; for neutral praise, or fit better.

2 Adverbs

2.1 — “about the same, more or less”

Read literally and it explains itself: (difference) + (not) + (much) = “not much difference.” Hence “about the same, more or less, almost.” It can stand alone as a predicate, link two things (A B), or work as an adverb before a quantity.

Structure: Subject + · A + / + B +

{zh: |zhè|these / |liǎng ge|two / |cí|words / |de / |yì si|meanings / |chà bu duō|about the same / 。 }

These two words mean about the same thing.

{zh: |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / |hé|and / |Niǔ yuē|New York / |chà bu duō|much the same / 。 }

Shanghai and New York are much the same.

Remember: (difference) (not) (much) — “not much off.” Decode the three characters and the meaning (“about the same / almost there”) falls out for free.

Watch out

- As an adverb it also means “almost (there)”: (“that’s about enough”), (“around ten”).
- For several items, add : .

2.2 — “it seems, apparently”

offers up the speaker’s **read of a situation** — “it seems, apparently.” Use + person + for “in someone’s view.” The pitfall is confusing it with (“it *looks* like” from physical appearance): is a *judgement in your head*, is *what your eyes report*.

Structure: + Judgement · + Person +

{zh: |kàn lái|it seems / |tā|he / |bù|not / |lái|coming / |le / 。 }

It seems he’s not coming.

{zh: |zài|in / |wǒ|my / |kàn lái|view / , |zhè ge|this / |jì huà|plan / |xíng bu tōng|won’t work / 。 }

In my view, this plan won’t work.

Remember: = “drawing it together, I reckon...” (a conclusion); = “it appears to the eye.” is the “arriving at a verdict” part — you’ve weighed things and landed on a view.

Watch out

- is “in *my* opinion” — a personal verdict, not a fact.

2.3 — “just right, as it happens”

is a happy bullseye — (exactly) + (right) — “just right” (in size, time, or amount) or “as it happens, happen to.” It plays both adjective and adverb.

Structure: Subject + + Verb Phrase · ... (adjective)

{zh: |nǐ|you / |lái|came / |le / ! |wǒ|I / |zhèng hǎo|was just about to / |yào / |zhǎo|look for / |nǐ|you / 。 }

You’re here! I was just about to look for you.

{zh: |zhè jiàn|this / |yī fu|outfit / |de / |dà xiǎo|size / |zhèng hǎo|just right / 。 }

This outfit is just the right size.

Remember: (exactly) (right) = a lucky bullseye — the right size, the right moment, the right amount, all landing at once.

Watch out

- Adverb (“just about to leave”) and adjective (“just the right size”) — same word, two roles.

2.4 — “have no choice but to”

is the **only option left** — (only) + (good/workable) — “the only workable choice, so I’ll take it (reluctantly).” English: “have no choice but to, can only, had to.”

Structure: (Situation,) (Subject +) + Verb Phrase

{zh: |cān tīng|the restaurants / |dōu|all / |guān mén|closed / |le / , |wǒ men|we / |zhǐ hǎo|had no choice but to / |qù|go / |chī|eat / |kuài cān|fast food / 。 }

The restaurants were all closed, so we had no choice but to get fast food.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |wàng|forgot / |le / |yù yuē|to book / , |zhǐ hǎo|so had to / |qù|go / |pái duì|queue / 。 }

I forgot to book, so I had to queue.

Remember: = “the **ONLY** good option left” — you do it, but you’d rather not. For a stronger, more forced “have to,” step up to .

Watch out

- It always carries a whiff of **reluctance** — the choice isn’t a happy one.

2.5 + / — emphatic negation

This has nothing to do with “again.” In front of / it adds a **defensive, argumentative** kick — “(but) it’s not even / it’s not as if ...” You’ll hear it constantly with / (“why on earth”).

Structure: + / + Predicate

{zh: |wèn|ask / |wǒ|me / |gàn má|why / ? |wǒ|I / |yòu|it’s not as if / |bù|don’t / |zhī dào|know / 。 }

Why ask me? It’s not as if I’d know.

{zh: |zhè xiē|these / |cài|dishes / |yòu|it’s not as if / |méi|haven’t / |huài|gone off / , |wèi shén me|why / |yào / |rēng|throw out / ? }

The food hasn’t even gone off — why throw it out?

Remember: + / = the “it’s-not-as-if” shrug (, ...) — a verbal eye-roll defending yourself. It is *not* the “again”, even though it’s the same character.

Watch out

- It needs that defensive context — without an implied “so why...?”, it reads as plain “again.”

2.6 + + — emphatic “really, so”

The adverb slams an adjective home — “really, so” — usually against what you’d expect. It’s informal and northern-flavoured, and it almost always closes with .

Structure: + Adjective +

{zh: |zhè zhī|this / |xiǎo gǒu|puppy / |kě|so / |táo qì|naughty / |le / ! }

This puppy is so naughty!

{zh: |tā|he / |kě|really / |yōu xiù|impressive / |le / ! }

He’s really impressive!

Remember: ... wraps an adjective in a “wow, really!” (, ,). It nearly always bookends with , and has a chatty, northern ring. (Note / are *not* examples of this pattern — there - is a word-building prefix meaning “-able / worthy of,” not the emphatic .)

Watch out

- also means “but,” can stress a verb (), or mean “finally” — context picks the sense.

2.7 — “originally; so it turns out”

wears two hats: “**original(ly), former**” (+ noun), and “**so it turns out / all along**” — that lightbulb moment when you suddenly grasp something you’d missed.

Structure: + + Noun · Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |yuán lái|so / |nǐ|you / |shì|are / |lǎo shī|a teacher / |a / ! }

Oh, so you’re a teacher!

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |yuán lái|originally / |zhù|lived / |zài|in / |Pǔ dōng|Pudong / 。 }

We originally lived in Pudong.

Remember: both senses share “**the way things really were all along.**” Realisation: (“ah, *so that’s* it!”). “Former”: (“the original price”). Contrast (“originally, *but it changed*”) at the end of this level.

Watch out

- The “aha!” sense is the one that surprises learners — ≠ “originally” there, it’s “it turns out.”

2.8 () — “almost (and didn’t)”

= “off by a hair” — something **nearly happened**, usually something **bad**, and the feeling is relief that it didn’t. The iron rule: whatever follows did **not** actually happen.

Structure: Subject + (+) + Predicate (+)

{zh: |chē|the car / |chà diǎn|almost / |zhuàng dào|hit / |wǒ|me / 。 }

The car almost hit me (it didn’t).

{zh: |wǒ|I / |jīn tiān|today / |chà diǎn|almost / |chí dào|was late / |le / 。 }

I was almost late today.

Remember: = “**missed it by THAT much**” → the thing did *not* happen (and good thing too). The famous quirk: *still* means “almost fell” — the adds feeling, not logic.

Watch out

- For a *wanted* outcome, flips to relief it *did* happen: (“only just caught it”).

2.9 + — “always, all along”

(“from the very start”) with () means “always, have always.” But you’ll meet it far more often in the **negative** — / = “never (not once).”

Structure: Subject + + () + Predicate

{zh: |tā|he / |cóng lái|always / |dōu|has / |zhè yàng|been like this / 。 }

He’s always been like this.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |cóng lái|never / |bù / |hē jiǔ|drink / 。 }

I never drink.

Remember: = “from the beginning until now.” Positive form needs (...); negative is the everyday one — / = “never, not a single time.”

Watch out

- Don’t drop the in the positive: ✓, not .

2.10 — “as a result, in the end”

As a connector, (“result”) means “as a result, and in the end” — and it usually drags in an **unexpected or unwelcome** outcome. It opens the second clause with a twist.

Structure: Reason / Situation , + Result

{zh: |tā|she / |chuān|dressed / |de / |hěn|very / |shǎo|lightly / , |jié guǒ|as a result / |gǎn mào|caught a cold / |le / 。 }

She dressed too lightly and ended up catching a cold.

{zh: |tā|he / |kāi|drove / |de / |tài|too / |kuài|fast / , |jié guǒ|as a result / |zhuàng dào|hit / |le / |rén|someone / 。 }

He drove too fast and ended up hitting someone.

Remember: = “the (often nasty) upshot.” It sets up a payoff that’s usually bad or surprising — “...and as a result, *of course*, X.”

Watch out

- It’s also a plain noun (“result”): (“the exam results”).

2.11 — “enough”

means “enough, sufficient.” Its trick is that **position flips the mood**: before a verb/adjective it’s “enough to ...” (,); after certain verbs it’s “fed up” (). It often takes .

Structure: + Verb / Adjective (+) · Verb + +

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |mǎi|bought / |de / |cài|food / |gòu|enough / |chī|to eat / |le / 。 }

We bought enough food.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |shòu|put up with it / |gòu|enough / |le / ! }

I’ve had enough!

Remember: before = “enough to” (); / V after = “had enough OF it.” Same word, opposite feeling, decided by which side of the verb it sits.

Watch out

- = “sick of eating it” (fed up), not “ate enough” — mind that “fed-up” tilt.

2.12 — “even, to the point that”

hauls in the most **extreme or surprising** case — “even, so much that.” It frequently links arms with ... / for extra punch.

Structure:, () + Extreme Case + / ...

{zh: |tā|he / |tài|too / |máng|busy / |le / , |shèn zhì|even / |chī|to eat / |wǔ fàn|lunch / |de / |shí jiān|time / |dōu / |méi yǒu|hasn’t / 。 }

He’s so busy he doesn’t even have time for lunch.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|question / |hěn|very / |jiǎn dān|simple / , |shèn zhì|even / |lián / |hái zi|a child / |dōu / |zhī dào|knows / 。 }

It’s so simple even a child knows the answer.

Remember: = “...even THIS!” — it reaches for the most extreme example to drive a point home, often hand-in-hand with

Watch out

- It escalates — the thing after should be the *most* surprising item, not just another one.

2.13 + + — “had better, after all”

Beyond “or,” before a verb settles on the **choice you prefer after weighing things up** — “had better, I’d rather (after all).” It loves to close with .

Structure: Subject + + Verb Phrase +

{zh: |hái shì|after all / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |qù|go / |ba / 。 }

Let’s go tomorrow after all.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |hái shì|had better / |bié|not / |qù|go / |le / 。 }

You’d better not go.

Remember: ... = “on reflection, better to...” — a verdict reached after mulling it over. Distinct from = “or” (in questions) or “still.”

Watch out

- The softens it into a gentle suggestion — dropping it makes the decision sound firmer.

2.14 — “had better, best to”

(“best”) moonlights as an adverb to give **gentle advice** — “had better, it would be best to.”

Structure: Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |nǐ|you / |zuì hǎo|had better / |xiān|first / |xiū xi|rest / |yí xià|a bit / 。 }

You’d better rest a bit first.

{zh: |wài miàn|outside / |lěng|cold / , |zuì hǎo|best to / |duō|more / |chuān|wear / |diǎn / 。 }

It’s cold out — best wear a bit more.

Remember: = “the best thing would be...” — advice with a soft touch, gentler than or . Negative: (“had best not”).

Watch out

- It’s a suggestion, not a rule — for an obligation use / instead.

2.15 — “have to, can’t but”

stacks a double negative — “not () able to not () do” — into a **reluctant, unavoidable** “have to.” It’s more forced and grudging than .

Structure: Subject + + Verb

{zh: |diàn tī|the lift / |yòu|again / |huài|broke / |le / , |wǒ men|we / |bù dé bù|had to / |pá|climb / |lóu tī|the stairs / 。 }

The lift broke again, so we had to take the stairs.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |tài|too / |lì hai|good / |le / , |wǒ|I / |bù dé bù|have to / |chéng rèn|admit it / 。 }

You’re so good — I have to admit it.

Remember: = “**can’t NOT do it**” (two negatives cancelling to a grudging yes). It shouts *no way out*; is the calmer, neutral “must / it’s required.”

Watch out

- Don’t miscount the negatives — means “have to go,” not “can’t go.”

2.16 — “on earth / after all / finally”

= “all the way to the bottom” — and it digs for the real answer. Three jobs: pressing in a question (“on earth, exactly”), “after all / in the end,” and “finally” (like).

Structure: · + Verb +

{zh: |nǐ|you / |dào dǐ|on earth / |xiǎng|want / |shuō|to say / |shén me|what / ? }

What on earth are you trying to say?

{zh: |tiān qì|the weather / |dào dǐ|finally / |nuǎn huò|warmed up / |le / 。 }

The weather has finally warmed up.

Remember: = “**get to the BOTTOM of it.**” In a *question* → “on earth / exactly” (); in a *statement* → “after all / finally.”

Watch out

- In a yes-no question, use the V-not-V form: (“are you going *or not*?”).

2.17 — “exactly, on earth” (formal)

is the more **formal** twin of — it sharpens a question hunting for a specific fact (a name, a time, a reason): “exactly, on earth.”

Structure: + Question Word ...

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |rén|person / |jiū jìng|on earth / |shì|is / |shéi|who / ? }

Who on earth is this person?

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |jiū jìng|exactly / |hái|still / |yào|have to / |děng|wait / |duō jiǔ|how long / ? }

Exactly how much longer do we have to wait?

Remember: = **in a suit**. Same “on earth / exactly” in questions, just a more written, formal register.

Watch out

- Both press a question; simply sounds more bookish than the everyday .

2.18 — “just (a moment ago)”

The adverb (or) marks an action that happened **a short time ago** — “just.” It sits right before the verb, and with a duration it needs no “ago” word.

Structure: Subject + + Verb

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |gāng|just / |zhī dào|found out / 。 }

We just found out.

{zh: |tā|he / |gāng|just / |lái|came to / |Zhōng guó|China / |liǎng ge|two / |yuè|months ago / 。 }

He came to China just two months ago.

Remember: = **adverb “just,” glued to the verb ()** — and “two months ago” needs no extra word: . Don’t mix it up with the *noun* (“a moment ago”) — see the comparison file later.

Watch out

- + duration measures time from *now*; marks a *point* in the recent past.

2.19 + + + — “one by one”

Double up + **measure word** and you get something happening **one unit at a time** — “one by one, step by step.” is the default measure word, but slot in whichever fits the noun.

Structure: + MW + + MW (+ Noun)

{zh: |bié|don't / |chǎo|all shout / , |yí ge|one / |yí ge|by one / |shuō|speak / 。 }

Don't all talk at once — one at a time.

{zh: |hái zi|the child / |yì tiān|day / |yì tiān|by day / |zhǎng dà|grows up / 。 }

The child grows up day by day.

Remember: repeat the measure word → “one _____ at a time”: (one by one), (step by step), (day by day), (over and over).

Watch out

- Match the measure word to the noun — for steps, for countable things.

2.20 — “originally (but it changed)”

means “originally, in the first place” — and it usually sets up that things **later changed course**. It often runs with ... plus a / clause; with it flips to “of course (it always was).”

Structure: Subject + (+) ... ,

{zh: |wǒ|I / |běn lái|originally / |yào|meant / |qù|to go / |de / , |kě shì|but / |hòu lái|then / |bìng|got sick / |le / 。 }

I'd meant to go, but then I got sick.

{zh: |bān jiā|moving house / |běn lái|to begin with / |jiù / |hěn|very / |má fan|troublesome / 。 }

Moving house is a hassle to begin with.

Remember: sets up a U-turn — “originally X... but then Y.” Contrast (a sudden *realisation*). And = “of course / obviously — it always was.”

Watch out

- If nothing changed and you mean “it turns out,” you want , not .

2.21 + — “only (this one)”

Park in front of the subject or quantity and it spotlights how **little** there is — “only, just (this one).” It often rides with / .

Structure: + Subject + Predicate · + Verb + Number + MW

{zh: |dà jiā|everyone / |dōu / |xià bān|left work / |le / , |jiù|only / |lǎo bǎn|the boss / |hái|still / |méi|hasn't / |zǒu|left / 。 }

Everyone's left work; only the boss is still here.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |jiù|only / |qù guo|been there / |yí cì|once / 。 }

I've only been there once.

Remember: like + number, this **shrinks things to “only / just”** (,), underlining smallness. It's a different from the “right away / as early as” one.

Watch out

- Context tells the two 's apart: a small *quantity* nearby → “only”; a *time* → “as early as / then.”

2.22 — “be sure to, whatever you do”

(literally “thousand ten-thousand”) is an **urgent plea** — “be sure to / whatever you do (don't) ...” The huge numbers *are* the emphasis. It almost always heads a command, paired with / / .

Structure: + (/ /) + Verb Phrase

{zh: |qiān wàn|whatever you do / |bié|don't / |wàng|forget / |le / |dài|to bring / |hù zhào|your passport / 。 }

Whatever you do, don't forget your passport.

{zh: |lù shàng|on the way / |qiān wàn|do be sure to / |yào / |xiǎo xīn|be careful / 。 }

Do be careful on the way.

Remember: big numbers = big urgency. piles “thousand” on “ten-thousand” to mean “I really, *really* mean it.” The go-to shape is ... (“whatever you do, DON'T...”).

Watch out

- It belongs in pleas and warnings — not a neutral statement.

2.23 — “I’m afraid (that), probably”

has (“fear”) right in it, and that’s the feel: a **likely but unwelcome** prediction softened with “I’m afraid that, I worry that.” It opens the clause, ideally before the subject, often with / .

Structure: (Reason,) + Subject + Predicate

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |kǒng pà|I’m afraid / |yào|going to / |xià yǔ|rain / 。 }

I’m afraid it’s going to rain today.

{zh: |kǒng pà|I’m afraid / |wǒ|I / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |bù néng|can’t / |lái|come / 。 }

I’m afraid I can’t come tomorrow.

Remember: **hides (fear)** — it’s a worried “I’m afraid...” about something *unwelcome*, never a cheerful guess. Place it **before** the subject for the most natural ring.

Watch out

- For a neutral “probably” (no dread), use instead.

2.24 — “unexpectedly, actually”

(or just) flags something **surprising or hard to believe** — “unexpectedly, actually, of all things.” It sits after the subject. It’s a near-match for , just a touch milder.

Structure: Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |zhè me|such a / |nán|hard / |de / |tí|problem / , |tā|he / |jìng rán|actually / |zuò|got it / |duì|right / |le / 。 }

Such a hard problem — and he actually got it right!

{zh: |tā|he / |jìng rán|unexpectedly / |bǎ / |zhè|this / |jiàn / |shì|matter / |wàng|forgot / |le / 。 }

He actually forgot all about it!

Remember: = a **jaw-drop** — “...and yet, of all things, X!” Best rendered “actually / of all things.” ≈ (slightly stronger), opposite of (“sure enough, as expected”).

Watch out

- It needs genuine surprise — drop it into a humdrum statement and it sounds off.

2.25 — rhetorical-question marker

turns a sentence into a **rhetorical question** of disbelief — “don’t tell me ...?, surely you don’t ...?”. It usually closes with and fishes for **agreement, not an answer**. English has no single word for it.

Structure: + Rhetorical Question +

{zh: |nán dào|don’t tell me / |nǐ|you / |zhēn de|really / |xiāng xìn|believe / |tā|him / |ma / ? }

You don’t actually believe him, do you?

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |shì|is / |wǒ|my / |de / |shēng rì|birthday / , |nán dào|don’t tell me / |nǐ|you / |bù|don’t / |zhī dào|know / |ma / ? }

It’s my birthday — don’t tell me you forgot?

Remember: = a built-in “surely not...?!” It marks the whole sentence as rhetorical — you’re pressing for the listener to *agree*, not to inform you. Usually ...

Watch out

- Don’t answer a question literally — it’s making a point, not seeking facts.

2.26 ... , ... — “first ... then ...”

... ... lines two actions up **in sequence** — “first A, then B.” As in HSK 3, the catch is that here means “(and) then,” **not** “again.” Chain longer runs with / .

Structure: + Verb 1 , + Verb 2

{zh: |xiān|first / |xǐ shǒu|wash hands / , |zài|then / |chī fàn|eat / 。 }

Wash your hands first, then eat.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yào|should / |xiān|first / |zuò|do / |zuò yè|homework / , |zài|then / |kàn|watch / |diàn shì|TV / 。 }

Do your homework first, then watch TV.

Remember: in, = “and then” (the next stepping stone), not “again.” Extend the chain with / for three or more steps.

Watch out

- Out of this pairing, *does* mean “again / more” — it’s the frame that fixes the “then” reading.

2.27 — “all ... too”

Stack (“also”) and (“all”) to sweep up a **whole group as well** — “all ... too.” The order is locked: **comes before** .

Structure: Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |wǒ|I’m / |hěn|very / |hǎo|well / , |wǒ|my / |de / |jiā rén|family / |yě dōu|all too / |hěn|very / |hǎo|well / 。 }

I’m well, and so is all my family.

{zh: |dà rén|adults / |xǐ huan|like / |zhè ge|this / |cān tīng|restaurant / , |hái zi men|the kids / |yě dōu|all too / |xǐ huan|like it / 。 }

The adults like this restaurant, and the kids all do too.

Remember: (also) + (all) in a **FIXED** order — , never . Think “also-all”: the whole group does it too.

Watch out

- Both adverbs sit before the verb together; you can’t split them around it.

3 Adverbs with Adjectives

3.1 + + — “quite, pretty”

... is a laid-back “quite, pretty, rather” — a relaxed, conversational intensifier that almost always wraps up with . It’s softer than and pops up constantly in everyday chat.

Structure: + Adjective +

{zh: |nǐ|your / |nán péng you|boyfriend / |tǐng|pretty / |shuài|handsome / |de / 。 }

Your boyfriend is pretty handsome.

{zh: |zuì jìn|lately / |dà jiā|everyone / |dōu / |tǐng|quite / |máng|busy / |de / 。 }

Everyone’s been quite busy lately.

Remember: wants its — , never bare . Think of ... as a matched pair of bookends around the adjective. It’s the casual, easygoing “pretty / quite,” softer than / .

Watch out

- Leave off the and it sounds unfinished to a native ear.

4 Auxiliary Words

4.1 — “and so on, and the like”

rounds off an **informal** list with a casual wave of the hand — “and so on, and stuff like that.” It can even trail a single item when it’s obvious what else belongs in the group.

Structure: Noun 1、Noun 2 (+ Noun 3) +

{zh: |wǒ|my / |nǎi nai|grandma / |zhǐ|only / |chī|eats / |shū cài|vegetables / 、 |dòu fu|tofu / |shén me de|and so on / 。 }

My grandma only eats vegetables, tofu, and the like.

{zh: |shù xué|maths / 、 |wù lǐ|physics / |shén me de|and so on / , |wǒ|I’m / |dōu / |bù|not / |gǎn xìng qù|interested / 。 }

Maths, physics and so on — I’m not interested in any of it.

Remember: = the chatty “...and stuff” — it waves at the rest without listing it. Its formal, neutral twin is / (next).

Watch out

- It’s casual — fine in speech, too loose for formal writing.

4.2 / — “etc.”

or closes a list more **formally** — “etc., and so forth.” One thing to unlearn from English: there’s **no comma** before it. It can also sit before a summarising noun (“... + category”).

Structure: A、B、C + / .

{zh: |xī guā|watermelon / 、 |pú tao|grapes / |děng děng|and so on / , |wǒ|I / |dōu|all / |xǐ huan|like / |chī|to eat / 。 }

Watermelon, grapes and so on — I like them all.

{zh: |Běi jīng|Beijing / 、 |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / |děng|and other / |chéng shì|cities}
cities such as Beijing and Shanghai

Remember: / = formal “etc.” — and **NO comma before it** (Chinese writes , not). It’s the written, neutral counterpart to the casual .

Watch out

- can also wrap up *before* a category noun: (“cities such as ...”).

5 Conjunctions

5.1 — a softer “but”

means “but, however” — the gentlest of the “but” family, lighter and chattier than / . It often just tacks a small qualification onto something otherwise positive.

Structure: ,

{zh: |zhè jiàn|this / |yī fu|outfit / |wǒ|I / |hěn|really / |xǐ huan|like / , |bú guò|but / |yǒu diǎn|a bit / |guì|pricey / 。 }

I really like this outfit, but it's a bit pricey.

{zh: |zhè jiā|this / |cān tīng|restaurant / |wǒ|I / |méi|haven't / |qù guo|been to / , |bú guò|but / |tīng shuō|I hear / |bú cuò|it's good / 。 }

I've never been to this restaurant, but I hear it's good.

Remember: = the lightest “but” — (not) (get past), a small snag you can't quite step over. Softer than / , and very conversational.

Watch out

- can also mean “only, merely” in other contexts (, “it's only a misunderstanding”).

5.2 — “and so, thereupon”

chains a cause to the action it **triggers** — “and so, thereupon.” The second event follows straight from the first. It's a **storytelling, past-tense** word, usually with , and often with .

Structure: , +

{zh: |zuó tiān|yesterday / |tū rán|suddenly / |xià yǔ|rained / |le / , |yú shì|and so / |wǒ men|we / |qǔ xiāo|cancelled / |le / |yě cān|the picnic / 。 }

It suddenly rained yesterday, so we cancelled the picnic.

{zh: |piào|the tickets / |mài guāng|sold out / |le / , |yú shì|so / |wǒ men|we / |mǎi|bought / |le / |huáng niú piào|scalped tickets / 。 }

The tickets sold out, so we bought scalped ones.

Remember: = **past-tense “and so”** — it narrates “X happened, *whereupon* Y followed.” For a timeless, logical cause→effect (“because X, therefore Y”), use / instead.

Watch out

- It belongs to narration of completed events — it pairs with (and often), not with future plans.

5.3 — “also, and another thing”

tacks on a further point as an **afterthought** — “also, plus, and another thing.” It tends to open a fresh sentence after a comma or full stop, the spoken “oh, and...”.

Structure:。.....

{zh: |nǐ|you / |xū yào|need to / |chī yào|take medicine / 。 |hái yǒu|also / , |yào|should / |duō|more / |xiū xi|rest / 。 }

You need to take medicine. Also, get plenty of rest.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yào|want / |dà bēi|a large / , |bú yào|no / |bīng|ice / , |hái yǒu|and / , |shǎo|easy on the / |fàng / |táng|sugar / 。 }

Large, no ice — and go easy on the sugar.

Remember: = “oh, and also...” — the casual afterthought, literally “still have (more to say).” Order-a-coffee energy: one more thing, then one more.

Watch out

- It’s informal — for a weightier “in addition,” reach for .

5.4 — “in addition, besides”

brings in a **separate, additional** point — “in addition, besides.” It’s a notch more formal than and usually teams up with / in the clause it adds. (It also means “another, separate.”)

Structure: (Subject) /

{zh: |wǒ|I / |méi|don’t have / |shí jiān|time / |cān jiā|to join / 。 |lìng wài|besides / , |wǒ|I / |yě|also / |bú tài|not really / |gǎn xìng qù|interested / 。 }

I don’t have time to join. Besides, I’m not really interested.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |háng bān|flight / |jīng cháng|often / |wǎn diǎn|delayed / 。 |lìng wài|in addition / , |fēi jī cān|the meals / |yě|also / |hěn|very / |nán chī|bad / 。 }

This flight is often late. On top of that, the food is awful too.

Remember: = a **SEPARATE extra point** (= “other / separate”) — more formal than , and it likes a / to echo it. It also means “another (separate) one”: .

Watch out

- The added clause usually carries / — ..., not a bare

5.5 — “besides, what’s more”

piles on an extra, often **clinching** reason to back a decision — “besides, what’s more, anyway.” It’s the “and another thing...” that seals the argument.

Structure: ,

{zh: |tài|too / |yuǎn|far / |le / , |zài shuō|besides / |wǒ|I / |yě|also / |méi|have no / |shí jiān|time / 。 }

It’s too far — besides, I’ve no time anyway.

{zh: |bié|don’t / |mǎi|buy it / |le / , |zài shuō|anyway / |nǐ|you / |yě / |bù|don’t / |quē|need it / 。 }

Don’t buy it — anyway, you don’t need it.

Remember: = “and what’s MORE...” — it adds a reason that clinches what you just said. Don’t confuse it with the in ... (“do X first, deal with it later”).

Watch out

- It reinforces a *decision* — it adds backing, not just a neutral extra fact.

5.6 / — “but”

and are the bread-and-butter words for “but.” is a shade more **formal** and emphatic; a touch softer. Otherwise they swap freely, and both happily follow (“although”).

Structure: Statement , / + Contrary Statement

{zh: |wǒ|I / |xǐ huan|like / |tā|him / , |kě shì|but / |tā|he / |bù|doesn’t / |xǐ huan|like / |wǒ|me / 。 }

I like him, but he doesn’t like me.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |gōng zuò|job / |hěn|very / |lèi|tiring / , |dàn shì|but / |wǒ|I / |hěn|really / |xǐ huan|like it / 。 }

This job is tiring, but I really like it.

Remember: = **firmer/formal**, = **softer/casual** — twins otherwise. Both pair with (.....), and Chinese happily keeps *both* halves, unlike English (“Although... but...” is fine in Chinese).

Watch out

- Don’t drop the after — Chinese likes the matching pair where English uses only one.

5.7 — joining contrasting ideas

links two related clauses, often pointing up a **contrast** — “but rather, while, and yet.” It’s an elegant, semi-written connector. Learn it through its two workhorse frames: **A B** and **A B**.

Structure: Sentence 1 + + Sentence 2 · A , B

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |shì|are / |lái|here to / |bàn shì|work / |de / , |ér|not / |bú shì / |lái|to / |wán|have fun / |de / 。 }

We’re here to work, not to have fun.

{zh: |hòu huǐ|regret it / |de / |rén|the one to / |bú shì|isn’t / |wǒ|me / , |ér shì|but / |nǐ|you / |zì jǐ|yourself / 。 }

The one who’ll regret it isn’t me — it’s you.

Remember: learn through its frames: **A B** = “not A but (rather) B”; **A B** = “A, not B.” Master those two and most uses of click into place.

Watch out

- It’s formal/literary in flavour but common in speech too, especially in those set frames.

5.8 / ... + — “(use X) to do Y”

The here is a tiny bridge from a **method to its purpose** — “(use / by means of X) to do Y.” It typically follows or + a method, then + the goal.

Structure: / + Method + + Verb Phrase

{zh: |hěn duō|many / |nián qīng rén|young people / |yòng|use / |shǒu jī|phone / APP / |lái|to / |diǎn|order / |wài mài|takeaway / 。 }

Lots of young people use phone apps to order takeaway.

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |yīng gāi|should / |xiǎng|find / |bàn fǎ|a way / |lái|to / |jiě jué|solve / |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|problem / 。 }

We should find a way to solve this problem.

Remember: = “in order to” — it joins the *means* (/ X) to the *goal* (+ verb). “Use the app order food.” The first half is the how, the half is the why.

Watch out

- The is optional but it makes the “so as to” link explicit and natural.

6 Nouns

6.1 — “among them, of which”

reaches back into a **group you’ve just named** — “among them, of which, of these.” It’s the Chinese “of which / of whom,” so it can’t stand without a group already on the table for it to point at.

Structure: Group ,

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yǒu|have / |sì|four / |liàng / |qì chē|cars / , |qí zhōng|of which / |sān|three / |liàng / |shì|are / |Bǎo mǎ|BMWs / 。 }

I have four cars, three of which are BMWs.

{zh: |zhè me|so / |duō|many / |xiàng mù|projects / , |qí zhōng|of which / |zuì|the most / |nán|difficult / |de / |shì|is / |huán jìng|the environmental / |xiàng mù|one / 。 }

Of all these projects, the hardest is the environmental one.

Remember: = “**within that (group)**” — (“that”) + (“inside”). It always looks *backward* to a set already mentioned; = “one of them.”

Watch out

- It can’t open a brand-new topic — name the group first, then .

7 Numbers

7.1 — fractions and percentages

Chinese builds a fraction **back to front**: **denominator** + + **numerator** — the **bottom number comes first**. It fits the language's big-to-small habit (whole first, then the slice). Percentages are just “out of 100” fractions: + number.

Structure: Denominator + + Numerator

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |wén jiàn|file / |yǐ jīng|already / |xià zǎi|downloaded / |le / |sān fēn zhī èr|two-thirds / 。 }

This file is already two-thirds downloaded.

{zh: |wǒ|my / |de / |shǒu jī|phone / |zhǐ|only / |yǒu|has / |bǎi fēn zhī wǔ|five percent / |le / 。 }

My phone's down to five percent.

Remember: bottom first, top last — read as “out of”: = “of four parts ()”, three ()” = $\frac{3}{4}$. Percent is just (“out of 100”) + the number: = 50%.

Watch out

- $\frac{3}{4}$ is , *never* — getting the order backwards flips the fraction.

8 Particles

8.1 ... — embedding a question inside a question

Here's a structure that looks like two questions but is really one. can close a clause that **embeds a question word** — “do you know *who / what / where* ...?” The front carries a verb of knowing (, ,), and the whole thing stays a plain yes/no question.

Structure: Confirmation (...) + embedded Question +

{zh: |nǐ|you / |zhī dào|know / |tā|he / |shì|is / |shéi|who / |ma / ? }

Do you know who he is?

{zh: |tā|she / |shuō guo|did say / |tā|she / |zhù|lives / |zài / |nǎr|where / |ma / ? }

Did she say where she lives?

Remember: the **makes it yes/no; the / inside is just part of the embedded clause.** “Do you know [who he is]?” — you're asking *whether* they know, not “who?”. Answer / .

Watch out

- The lead verb is one of knowing/saying: , , , .

8.2 ... , ; ... , — weighing two options

Echo across two options and you lay out a **dilemma** — “if A ..., but if B ...” It has an indecisive, no-win ring, and the two options are usually both unappealing.

Structure: Option 1 + ; Option 2 +

{zh: |dōng tiān|in winter / |qù|go / |ba / , |tài|too / |lěng|cold / ; |xià tiān|in summer / |qù|go / |ba / , |tài|too / |rè|hot / 。 }

Go in winter and it's too cold; go in summer and it's too hot.

{zh: |bù|not / |shuō|tell him / |ba / , |tā|he / |huì|will / |zuò cuò|get it wrong / ; |shuō|tell him / |ba / , |tā|he / |bù|won't / |gāo xìng|be happy / 。 }

If I don't tell him he'll get it wrong; if I do, he'll be upset.

Remember: **doubled = a no-win fork** — “do A , downside; do B , downside.” Picture a shrug at each branch: whichever you pick, it stings.

Watch out

- Both options should carry a drawback — that's what gives the pattern its trapped, can't-win feel.

8.3 — the modal particle

A sentence-final can add a tone of **certainty or reassurance** — “(it) definitely (is / will be).” It often rides with or , sealing a promise or a confident prediction.

Structure: Statement (+ ...) +

{zh: |wǒ|I / |bù|won’t / |huì / |piàn|lie to / |nǐ|you / |de / 。 }

I would never lie to you.

{zh: |nǐ men|you / |huì|will / |chéng gōng|succeed / |de / 。 }

You will succeed.

Remember: this = a **spoken full stop of conviction** — “trust me, it’s so.” It’s *not* the possessive . It loves a / ahead of it: (“you *will* make it”).

Watch out

- Don’t read this as “of / ‘s” — here it carries tone, not ownership.

9 Prepositions

9.1 — “along with, as”

ties one thing to another that **moves in step with it** — “along with, as, in the wake of.” means “follow,” so the clause sets a *moving backdrop* and the main clause tracks it. It’s formal in flavour and translates a dozen different ways.

Structure: + Noun (+ + change) , Subject + Predicate

{zh: |suí zhe|as / |jīng jì|the economy / |de / |fā zhǎn|develops / , |shēng huó|life / |yuè lái yuè|more and more / |hǎo|comfortable / 。 }

As the economy develops, life keeps getting better.

{zh: |hái zi men|the children / |suí zhe|along to / |yīn yuè|the music / |tiào|started / |qǐ / |le / |wǔ|dancing / 。 }

The children started dancing along to the music.

Remember: = “**follow**” — X means “keeping pace with X.” Picture two things moving together: as the economy rises, life rises *with* it. The part is the lead, the main clause follows.

Watch out

- It’s written/formal — in casual speech you’d often just use or a plain cause clause.

9.2 ... / ... — “in terms of” / “under (conditions)”

These look like “on” and “under,” but here they’re **abstract** brackets. ... frames the **field or aspect** something holds in — “in (the area of), in terms of, on the matter of.” Its sibling ... frames a **condition** — “under (such circumstances).”

Structure: + Topic + , + Condition + ,

{zh: |zài|on / |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|matter / |shàng / , |wǒ men|our / |de / |kàn fǎ|views / |yí yàng|are the same / 。 }

On this matter, our views are the same.

{zh: |zài|under / |zhè zhǒng|these kinds of / |qíng kuàng|circumstances / |xià / , |nǐ|you / |huì|would / |zěn me|how / |zuò|act / ? }

Under these circumstances, what would you do?

Remember: these are **abstract, not literal**: ... = “**in the area of**” (“in history,” “grammatically”); ... = “**under (conditions)**” (“with help”). Nothing is physically on top of or beneath anything.

Watch out

- Don't read them as real positions — is “on this *issue*,” not “on top of a problem.”

10 Sentence Patterns

10.1 + / — emphatic negation

in front of a negative **pushes back against an expectation** — “(it’s) actually *not*, contrary to what you’d think.” Because it counters an assumption, it’s the go-to for disagreeing or correcting. It only pairs with or .

Structure: Subject + + / + Verb / Adjective

{zh: |zài|in / |Zhōng guó|China / |chuàng yè|starting a business / |bìng|actually / |bù|not / |róng yì|easy / 。 }

Starting a business in China actually isn’t easy.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |bìng|actually / |méi|didn’t / |shuō guo|say / |zhè|this / |jù / |huà / 。 }

I never actually said that.

Remember: / = “actually NOT — despite what you assume.” Use it whenever you’re correcting a wrong impression: “you think it’s easy? .” It’s a firm, slightly defensive negative.

Watch out

- It only attaches to or (,) — never to a bare verb on its own.

11 Sentence patterns

11.1 ... — “take A as B”

The elegant, semi-classical frame **A B** means “take / regard A as B” — treating one thing as your basis, standard, or focus. It rings formal, and it’s the engine behind a whole family of set phrases.

Structure: + A + + B

{zh: |wǒ men|our / |gōng sī|company / |yǐ|takes / |Yà zhōu|the Asian / |shì chǎng|market / |wéi|as / |zhǔ|its focus / 。 }

Our company focuses mainly on the Asian market.

{zh: |xǔ duō|many / |qǐ yè|firms / |fā zhǎn|grow / |hěn|very / |kuài|fast / , |yǐ|take / |Mài dāng láo|McDonald’s / |wéi|as / |lì|an example / 。 }

Many firms have grown fast — take McDonald’s as an example.

Remember: **A B** = “take A as your B.” Memorise the set phrases and you’ve got it: ... (“mainly”), ... (“for example”), ... (“proud of”), (“put people first”). The everyday paraphrase is A B.

Watch out

- It’s formal/written — in casual speech, A B carries the same idea.

12 Verbs

12.1 / / / — making someone do something

These **causative** verbs slot a **person** between the verb and what they end up doing — “make / let / ask / cause someone to ...” Sort them by tone: (everyday “make / let”), (colloquial “tell”), (polite “ask / invite”), (formal “cause”). At HSK 4 the result can be a verb *or* an adjective.

Structure: Subject + / / / + Person + Predicate

{zh: |nǐ|you / |wèi shén me|why / |bù|not / |ràng|let / |wǒ|me / |qù|go / ? }

Why won't you let me go?

{zh: |zhè bù|this / |diàn yǐng|film / |ràng|makes / |rén|people / |hěn|very / |gǎn dòng|moved / 。 }

This film is really moving.

{zh: |tā|his / |de / |yǎn jiǎng|speech / |shǐ|made / |tīng zhòng|the audience / |fēi cháng|very / |jī dòng|excited / 。 }

His speech made the audience very excited.

Remember: four causatives, sorted by politeness: **(formal)** → **(neutral)** → **(casual)** → **(polite)**. New at HSK 4: the result can be an **adjective** of feeling — (“makes people moved”), (“excites people”).

Watch out

- covers both “make” and “let” — context decides which.

12.2 / — “it depends on”

/ — literally “have to look at” — is the everyday “it depends on” The factor it hinges on usually carries a question word.

Structure: / + / + Factor

{zh: |zhè|that / |děi kàn|depends on / |nǐ|your / |de / |shí jiān|schedule / 。 }

That depends on your schedule.

{zh: |qù bu qù|whether I go / |děi kàn|depends on / |wǒ|my / |de / |xīn qíng|mood / 。 }

Whether I'll go depends on my mood.

Remember: = “(I’ll) have to look at...” = “it depends on...”. The deciding factor almost always holds a question word: , . Quick fixed reply: (“depends on the situation”).

Watch out

- here is *děi* (“have to”), not the structural (*de*) of complements.

12.3 — “it seems, as if”

softens a statement to an **impression** — “it seems, looks like, as if.” With a subject it’s “X seems ...”; with no subject it’s “it seems that ...” It can pair with (“as if”) at the end.

Structure: (Subject +) + Predicate

{zh: |tā|he / |hǎo xiàng|seems / |shì|to be / |Yīng guó rén|British / 。 }

He seems to be British.

{zh: |hǎo xiàng|it seems / |yào|going to / |xià yǔ|rain / |le / 。 }

It looks like it’s going to rain.

Remember: = “seems / as if” — a soft hedge, literally “much resembles.” No subject → “it seems that...” (). Its formal twin is ; don’t mix it up with (a belief that turned out *wrong*).

Watch out

- It’s softer than a flat statement — it signals you’re not fully sure.

12.4 — “lies in”

pins down where something’s **essence or key** rests — “lies in, consists in, is a matter of.” It’s a formal, essay-style verb.

Structure: Topic + + Key Point

{zh: |chéng gōng|success / |zài yú|lies in / |jiān chí|perseverance / 。 }

Success lies in perseverance.

{zh: |lǐ wù|a gift / |zài yú|is about / |xīn yì|the thought / , |bù|not / |zài yú|about / |guì zhòng|how costly / 。 }

A gift is about the thought, not how costly it is.

Remember: = “the key lies IN...” (“at” + “in”) — points to where the heart of the matter sits. With a *person* it means “is up to”: (“whether to go is up to you”).

Watch out

- Formal and written — in speech you’d say or instead.

12.5 — “(mistakenly) think, assume”

Chinese has a dedicated verb for a belief that turned out **wrong**: . Whatever follows is the *incorrect* idea you held — the sentence usually carries a quiet “...but I was wrong.”

Structure: Subject + + (wrong belief)

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yǐ wéi|thought / |tā|he / |shì|was / |Dé guó rén|German / 。 }

I thought he was German (he isn’t).

{zh: |bié|don’t / |yǐ wéi|think / |wǒ|I / |bù|don’t / |zhī dào|know / 。 }

Don’t think I don’t know.

Remember: = a belief that proved **WRONG** (“I thought X... turns out not”). For a belief you simply hold, use / . The giveaway opener: ... (“I’d assumed (wrongly) that...”).

Watch out

- Swapping for changes the meaning — makes no claim that you were mistaken.

12.6 — “through; to pass”

wears two hats: as a **verb**, “go through (a place) / pass (an exam)”; as a **preposition**, “by means of, via.”

Structure: + Place / Exam (verb) · + Method / Agent , (preposition)

{zh: |wǒ|I / |tōng guò|passed / |le / |zhè ge|this / |kǎo shì|exam / 。 }

I passed this exam.

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |tōng guò|through / |tā|his / |de / |péng you|friend / |zhǎo dào|found / |le / |tā|him / 。 }

We found him through his friend.

Remember: = “pass through” — through an *exam/place* (verb:) or through a *method/middleman* (preposition: “via a friend”). Compare , which leans on “after a process.”

Watch out

- As a preposition it sets up a means before the main clause: .

12.7 — “come from”

is one compact verb for a source or origin — “come / originate from.” It’s more formal than ... , perfect for introductions, and it stretches to abstract sources too.

Structure: Subject + + Place / Source

{zh: |wǒ|I / |lái zì|come from / |Zhōng guó|China / 。 }

I’m from China.

{zh: |wǒ|my / |de / |zhè ge|this / |xiǎng fǎ|idea / |lái zì|comes from / |shēng huó|everyday life / 。 }

This idea of mine comes from everyday life.

Remember: = “comes from” in one tidy word (“come” + “from”). Great for intros (...) and abstract origins (... , “inspiration comes from...”). Casual version:

Watch out

- It takes its source *directly*, with no : ✓, not .

12.8 — the “dummy” verb

A bare can stand in for a more specific verb — “(let me) do it, your turn, have a go” — when the real action is obvious from context. It’s a short phrase ending in (sometimes), usually with or .

Structure: (+) Subject + (+)

{zh: |wǒ|I / |lái|do it / |ba / 。 }

Let me do it.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |xiě|write / |de / |hǎo kàn|nicely / , |nǐ|you / |lái|do it / |ba / 。 }

You write nicely — you do it.

Remember: this **does NOT mean “come”** — it’s a placeholder for the obvious verb, like English “I’ll *get* this.” (“I’ll do it”), (“your turn”), (“let him have a go”).

Watch out

- Only use it when the real action is clear from context — otherwise name the verb.

13 Auxiliary verbs

13.1 — “don’t need to, no need”

means “(there’s) no need to, don’t have to” — it lifts an obligation. The classic trap: the negative of (“need to”) is , *not* (which means “don’t / don’t want”).

Structure: Subject + + Verb Phrase

{zh: |bú yòng|no need to / |dān xīn|worry / 。 }

No need to worry.

{zh: |hái zi|children / |bú yòng|don’t need to / |mǎi|buy / |piào|a ticket / 。 }

Children don’t need to buy a ticket.

Remember: (“need to”) → (“needn’t”), **NOT** . cancels a *need*; is a *prohibition* (“don’t”); = “can’t”; = “shouldn’t.” Pick by which one you’re denying.

Watch out

- (“you’re welcome”) is literally “no need to thank” — the same .

13.2 + — “have to, must”

The auxiliary — read **děi** here — is a blunt, spoken “have to, must,” a practical necessity.

Structure: Subject + + Verb Phrase

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |děi|have to / |zǒu|go / |le / 。 }

We have to go now.

{zh: |shí jiān|the time / |bù zǎo|getting late / |le / , |wǒ|I / |děi|have to / |huí jiā|go home / |le / 。 }

It’s getting late — I have to head home.

Remember: = **děi** = “gotta.” Its negative borrows (“needn’t”), *not* . And mind the reading: this is **děi** (“must”), a world away from the *de* of complements () or the particles / .

Watch out

- One character, three readings: **děi** (must), **de** (complement marker), **dé** (“obtain”). Context picks it.

14 Verb phrases

14.1 + — “and (also)”

Between two verb phrases, links them as “and, and also.” It’s picky: it joins **verbs or clauses** (never nouns — that’s 是’s job), usually two-syllable verbs, with a considered, written ring.

Structure: Verb Phrase 1 + + Verb Phrase 2

{zh: |wǒ|I / |tóng yì|agree with / |bìng|and / |zhī chí|support / |nǐ|your / |de / |jué
dìng|decision / 。 }

I agree with and support your decision.

{zh: |huì yì|the meeting / |tǎo lùn|discussed / |bìng|and / |tōng guò|approved / |le /
|jì huà|the plan / 。 }

The meeting discussed and approved the plan.

Remember: joins verbs/clauses, joins nouns. “Discussed approved” (verbs) ✓; “tea coffee” (nouns) ✓. is the formal “and” for actions.

Watch out

- Don’t use between nouns — ×.

14.2 + — “do ... less”

before a verb means do **less** of it — the staple of advice and gentle scolding. The bit that flips for English speakers: comes **before** the verb, where English puts “less” after.

Structure: + Verb (+ Object)

{zh: |qǐng|please / |shǎo|less / |fàng|add / |diǎn|a bit of / |yán|salt / 。 }

Use a bit less salt, please.

{zh: |shǎo|less / |shuō|talk / |fèi huà|nonsense / ! }

Quit the babbling!

Remember: / go **BEFORE** the verb — (“drink less water”), the reverse of English order. It softens a blunt “don’t”: (“mind your own business,” lit. “meddle less”).

Watch out

- Never — the amount-word leads: , .

14.3 + — “do ... more”

before a verb means do **more** of it. Like its twin , it sits **before** the verb — exactly where English puts “more” *after* (“eat more” →).

Structure: + Verb (+ Object)

{zh: |duō|more / |chī|eat / |diǎn|a bit / 。 }

Eat a bit more.

{zh: |yé ye|grandpa / , |nǐ|you / |yào|should / |duō|more / |chū qù|go out / |zǒu zou|for walks / 。 }

Grandpa, you should go out for walks more.

Remember: “eat more” flips to “more-eat” (). and both lead the verb — that front position is the whole trick, and it’s the opposite of English.

Watch out

- It’s the mirror of — both are everyday advice words (,).

14.4 + Person + — naming who does it

spotlights **who is responsible** for an action — “(it’s) for X to do, handled by X.” It’s at home in formal and business contexts.

Structure: Topic + + Person + Verb

{zh: |zhè|this / |jiàn / |shì|matter / |yóu / |wǒ|me / |fù zé|is handled by / 。 }

I’m responsible for this matter.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |xiàng mù|project / |yóu|by / |Xiǎo Lǐ|Xiao Li / |lái / |wán chéng|to be done / 。 }

This project is to be done by Xiao Li.

Remember: **X = “it’s X’s to handle.”** It assigns the doer or the responsibility — (“I’ll take care of it”), (“it’s your call”). Formal in tone.

Watch out

- Don’t confuse it with the passive — assigns *responsibility*, not “suffered by.”

14.5 — “moreover, and also”

joins verb phrases or clauses — “and, moreover.” Plain, it just means “and” (like); with / it means “**moreover**,” pushing the first idea a step further.

Structure: VP1 + + VP2 · VP1 + + / + VP2

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |fāng fǎ|method / |jiǎn dān|simple / , |bìng qiě|and also / |yǒu xiào|effective / 。 }

This method is simple, and effective too.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |tōng zhī|told / |le / |suǒ yǒu rén|everyone / , |bìng qiě|moreover / |hái|also / |zhǔn bèi|prepared / |le / |cái liào|the materials / 。 }

I told everyone, and moreover prepared the materials.

Remember: = “and (what’s more).” With / it escalates (“moreover, on top of that”). It’s the more written cousin of .

Watch out

- In the .../ escalation, you can’t shrink it to a bare .

14.6 + / — “never”

with a negative means “never” — and the choice of negative matters. + = “never (as a rule, by habit)”; + () + Verb + = “have never (done it in my life).” In speech both shorten to .

Structure: Subject + + + VP · Subject + + () + Verb +

{zh: |tā|she / |cóng lái|never / |bù / |hē jiǔ|drinks / 。 }

She never drinks.

{zh: |tā|she / |cóng lái|never / |méi|has / |jiàn|met / |guo / |tā|her / |mā ma|mother / 。 }

She has never met her mother.

Remember: = “never (habit/rule)”; ... = “never (in experience),” with the experiential . Habit → ; lifetime experience → Both can shrink to / .

Watch out

- Don’t drop the in the experience version: ✓, not .

14.7 + — “worth ...ing”

says an action is **worth** doing — it goes before a verb. Keep it apart from money: is about whether *doing* something pays off; for cash value you want plain .

Structure: (Subject +) + Verb

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |xiǎng fǎ|idea / |zhí de|worth / |kǎo lǜ|considering / 。 }

This idea is worth considering.

{zh: |zhè|this / |běn / |shū|book / |hěn|well / |zhí de|worth / |yí kàn|a read / 。 }

This book is well worth a read.

Remember: = **worth DOING (an action)**; = **worth MONEY**. (“worth a look”), (“worth learning from”) — but (“this is worth 100 kuai”).

Watch out

- Follow with a verb, not a price — for price, use .

14.8 + + Time — “(do) until”

after a verb, plus a time or event, works like “**until**.” It often takes to stress the unbroken stretch. The structural catch: when the verb has an object, you **repeat the verb**.

Structure: (+) Verb + + Time / Event · Verb + Obj + Verb + + Time

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |zài|at / |jiǔ bā|the bar / |yì zhí|right / |liáo|chatted / |dào|until / |bàn yè|midnight / 。 }

We chatted at the bar until midnight.

{zh: |tā|she / |xiě|did / |zuò yè|homework / |xiě|until / |dào / |shí èr diǎn bàn|12:30 / 。 }

She did homework until 12:30.

Remember: with an object, repeat the verb: (do-homework, *do-until*-12). A bare ... is wrong. ... underlines that the action ran the whole way to that point.

Watch out

- The repeated-verb rule trips everyone — say the verb once for the object, once for the + time.

14.9 — “cause (trouble), make (badly)”

(or just) pins the blame on something for a **bad outcome** — “(it) caused / led to (something bad) for me.” There’s always a note of complaint, and the cause comes before .

Structure: Reason , () + Undesirable Situation

{zh: |xià wǔ|in the afternoon / |hē|drank / |le / |liǎng|two / |bēi / |kā fēi|coffees / ,
|hài de|which kept / |wǒ|me / |wǎn shang|at night / |shuì bu zháo|from sleeping / 。 }

I had two coffees, which kept me from sleeping at night.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |hài de|made / |wǒ men|us / |dōu|all / |chí dào|late / |le / 。 }

You made us all late.

Remember: = “harm,” so always blames — “...which (annoyingly) made me...”
Reserve it for *bad* results; the can drop ().

Watch out

- Never use it for a good outcome — for a neutral “make/cause,” use / .

14.10 — separable (verb-object) words

A surprising number of “verbs” are secretly **verb + object** pairs — (“meet” = see-face), (“sleep” = sleep-a-sleep), (“help” = do-a-favour), (“marry” = tie-marriage). Other words slot **between** the two halves, and you **can’t** add another object after the whole word.

Structure: Verb + (insert) + Object

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |jiàn|have met / |guo / |miàn / 。 }

We’ve met before.

{zh: |tā|he / |bāng|did / |le / |wǒ|me / |yí ge|a / |máng|favour / 。 }

He did me a favour.

Remember: a separable word is **verb + its own object stuck together (+)**. Inserts (/ / a number-phrase) go *between* the halves — , — and you **can’t** bolt a new object on the end: ✓, never .

Watch out

- This is *the* classic error: × → ✓. The “object” slot is already taken by .

14.11 + + + + ... — “while ...ing, suddenly”

Double up **Verb** + to set a rolling background action; then springs the next event — “as one was ...ing, ... (suddenly) happened.” It catches a turn that sneaks up *during* the action, often before you notice.

Structure: Verb + + Verb + + + Result +

{zh: |zǒu|walking / |zhe / |zǒu|walking / |zhe / , |jiù|then / |dào jiā|got home / |le /
。 }

Walking along, before we knew it we were home.

{zh: |tā|she / |shuō|talking / |zhe / |shuō|talking / |zhe / , |jiù|suddenly / |kū|cried
/ |le / 。 }

As she talked, she suddenly started crying.

Remember: VV... = “as I kept ...ing, before I knew it ...!” The doubled keeps an action rolling; + springs the surprise that crept up during it ().

Watch out

- Both verbs are the *same* ongoing action; introduces the new thing that emerged from it.

15 “But” Statements

15.1 ... — “although, even though”

... concedes a point, then overrides it — “although A, (but) B.” is a shade stronger and more formal than — closer to “despite, even though” — and the second clause often carries (“still”).

Structure: + A , (+) Subject + + B

{zh: |jǐn guǎn|although / |hěnn duō|many / |rén|people / |pī píng|criticise / |tā|him / , |tā|he / |hái shì|still / |jiān chí|insists on / |zhè me / |zuò|doing it / 。 }

Although many people criticise him, he still insists on doing it.

{zh: |jǐn guǎn|although / |wǒ|I / |hěnn|very / |shēng qì|angry / , |dàn shì|but / |méi|didn't / |fā pí qì|lose my temper / 。 }

Although I was furious, I didn't lose my temper.

Remember: = formal “although / despite” (a notch above); the second half loves a / . Don't confuse it with the *other* = “go right ahead, feel free” (, “ask away”).

Watch out

- Like, Chinese keeps *both* halves where English uses one.

15.2 — “actually, contrary to expectation”

The adverb flags a **surprising turn** — “actually, on the contrary, if anything.” It usually ushers in a *positive* or unexpected comment, and often pairs with or .

Structure: , Subject + (+ /)

{zh: |tā|he / |bú shì|isn't / |hěnn|very / |nǚ lì|hard-working / , |chéng jì|his grades / |dào|but actually / |yě / |bú cuò|aren't bad / 。 }

He's not very hard-working, but his grades actually aren't bad.

{zh: |Yīng yǔ|English / |bú shì|isn't / |tā|his / |de / |mǔ yǔ|native language / , |tā|he / |shuō|speaks / |de / |dào|actually / |tǐng|quite / |dì dào|native-like / 。 }

English isn't his native language, but he actually speaks it quite naturally.

Remember: = a “huh, actually...” twist — usually a *pleasant* surprise (the bright side). “Actually” almost always works in the English. Contrast its gloomier cousin (the disappointing twist).

Watch out

- Don't confuse this (dào, “actually”) with (dǎo, “fall over”) — same character, different reading and meaning.

15.3 — “however, yet”

The adverb marks a **contrast inside the sentence** — “yet, however.” Crucially it sits **before the verb** (after the subject), never at the start, and it often appears alongside .

Structure: Sentence , (+) Subject +

{zh: |tā|he / |shì|is / |lǎo bǎn|the boss / , |què|yet / |méi yǒu|no one / |rén / |tīng|listens to / |tā|him / |de / 。 }

He's the boss, yet nobody listens to him.

{zh: |tā|his / |de / |xué lì|qualifications / |hěn|very / |gāo|high / , |néng lì|his ability / |què|however / |hěn|very / |yì bān|average / 。 }

He's highly qualified, but his ability is only average.

Remember: hides before the verb (... , never ...) and usually brings the **disappointing** twist — the dark twin of . It teams up with :

Watch out

- Unlike English “however,” can't lead the sentence — it tucks in after the subject.

16 “Even If” Statements

16.1 ... — “even if”

... grants a **hypothetical** and then says it changes **nothing** — “even if A, still B.” The clause after is a supposition you’re entertaining; the clause overrides it.

Structure: + Condition , (Subject +) + Result

{zh: |jí shǐ|even if / |nǐ|you / |bù|don’t / |xiǎng|want / |ràng|to let / |wǒ|me / |qù|go / , |wǒ|I / |yě|still / |yào|will / |qù|go / 。 }

Even if you don’t want me to go, I’m still going.

{zh: |jí shǐ|even if / |nǐ|you / |hěn|very / |yǒu qián|rich / , |yě|still / |mǎi bu dào|can’t buy / |xìng fú|happiness / 。 }

Even if you were rich, you couldn’t buy happiness.

{zh: |jí shǐ|even if / |nǐ|you / |méi wèi kǒu|have no appetite / , |yě|still / |yào|should / |chī|eat / |yì diǎn|a little / 。 }

Even if you’ve no appetite, you should still eat a bit.

Remember: = “even IF” (a supposition); = “even THOUGH” (an actual fact). Hypothetical →; real situation → The in the second clause is non-negotiable.

Watch out

- Close cousins arrive at HSK 5: ... and ... (both “even if”), a touch more colloquial.

17 “If” Statements

17.1 ... — “if ... then ...”

... is the everyday spoken “if ... then ...” — a casual twin of ... , especially common in northern China. The opens the result clause.

Structure: + Condition , + Result

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yào shì|if / |zhēn|really / |xiǎng|miss / |wǒ|me / , |jiù|then / |gěi / |wǒ|me / |dǎ diàn huà|call / 。 }

If you really miss me, then call me.

{zh: |yào shì|if / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |bù|doesn't / |xià yǔ|rain / , |wǒ men|we / |jiù|then / |qù|go / |pá shān|hiking / 。 }

If it doesn't rain tomorrow, we'll go hiking.

Remember: = **the chatty** — same “if,” more spoken (and northern). Both fire in the result. Bonus pattern: ... = “if it weren't for...” (, “if not for the traffic, I'd be there already”).

Watch out

- After the subject, can shrink to :

18 “No Matter” Statements

18.1 ... / ... — “no matter” (spoken)

... / ... says the outcome holds **whatever** the case — “no matter (what / how) ..., still ...”. The catch: the first clause must contain an **open variable** — a **choice** (A B / A-not-A) or a **question word** (, , ...). It’s the conversational option.

Structure: + (Question Word / choice) , (Subject +) / + Result

{zh: |bù guǎn|no matter / |nǐ|you / |chuān|wear / |shén me|what / , |dōu|all / |hǎo kàn|look good / 。 }

No matter what you wear, it looks good on you.

{zh: |bù guǎn|no matter / |zěn me yàng|what happens / , |wǒ men|we / |dōu|all / |yào|must / |hǎo hǎo|properly / |zhǔn bèi|prepare / 。 }

No matter what, we must prepare properly.

Remember: needs something **OPEN** after it — a question word (/ /) or an “AB / A-not-A” choice — then / nails the result down regardless. = *spoken*; / = *formal* (next).

Watch out

- Without an open variable it’s wrong: ✓, but you can’t say ...

18.2 / ... / ... — “no matter, regardless”

(or) is the more **formal** “no matter, regardless of” — grammatically identical to . The clause after it likewise holds a question word (, , ...) or a choice.

Structure: / + (Question Word / choice) , / + Result

{zh: |wú lùn|no matter / |duō me|how / |chéng gōng|successful / , |tā|he / |dōu|always / |jué de|feels / |zì jǐ|himself / |bú gòu|not / |hǎo|good enough / 。 }

No matter how successful he is, he always feels he’s not good enough.

{zh: |wú lùn|no matter / |tiān|the weather / |duō|how / |rè|hot / , |dōu|always / |yào|must / |jiān chí|keep going / 。 }

No matter how hot it gets, we have to keep going.

Remember: / = **the written** — same grammar, same need for an open variable + / . Speech → ; writing → .

Watch out

- The same rule applies: the following clause needs a question word or a choice, never a flat statement.

19 Cause/Effect Statements

19.1 — “due to, owing to”

sets up a **cause** at the front of a sentence — “due to, owing to, because of.” It’s more formal than , and it often pairs with / in the result clause.

Structure: + Cause , (/)

{zh: |yóu yú|due to / |tiān qì|weather / |yuán yīn|reasons / , |háng bān|the flight / |qǔ xiāo|was cancelled / |le / 。 }

Due to the weather, the flight was cancelled.

{zh: |yóu yú|due to / |yì jiàn|opinions / |bù yí zhì|differing / , |liǎng|the two / |wèi / |lǎo bǎn|bosses / |chǎo|started arguing / |le / |qǐ lái / 。 }

Due to differing opinions, the two bosses started arguing.

Remember: = **the formal** — it heads the *cause* and likes to hand off to / for the result (... , ...). One pairing trap: can pair with , but leans toward .

Watch out

- It’s written-leaning — in casual speech is far more common.

19.2 ... — “since, now that”

... reasons forward from an **accepted fact** — “since / now that A is so, then B.” It stands on something already true and draws a suggestion or inference (often with /). It is **not** a hypothetical.

Structure: + (given fact) , () + Suggestion / Inference

{zh: |jì rán|since / |nǐ|you / |nà me|so / |xǐ huan|like it / , |nà jiù|then just / |mǎi|buy it / |ba / 。 }

Since you like it so much, just buy it.

{zh: |jì rán|since / |dà jiā|everyone / |dōu / |bù|isn’t / |gǎn xìng qù|interested / , |jiù|then / |huàn|change / |ge / |huà tí|the topic / |ba / 。 }

Since no one’s interested, let’s change the subject.

Remember: = “since (we both know) X is true...” — it builds on a *given fact*, then suggests (...). Contrast / , which build on an *if*. Fact → ; supposition → .

Watch out

- The result is a suggestion or inference, usually led by / / .

19.3 — “therefore, as a result”

(“because of this”) rolls out a **consequence** — “therefore, as a result, for this reason.” It’s formal and common in writing, pairing naturally with a / cause.

Structure: Cause , + Effect

{zh: |zuó tiān|yesterday / |xià yǔ|it rained / |le / , |yīn cǐ|therefore / |wǒ|I / |méi yǒu|didn’t / |chū mén|go out / 。 }

It rained yesterday, so I didn’t go out.

{zh: |tā|she / |zài|in / |nóng cūn|the countryside / |zhǎng dà|grew up / , |yīn cǐ|therefore / |hěn|well / |liǎo jiě|understands / |nóng mín|farmers’ / |de / |shēng huó|life / 。 }

She grew up in the countryside, so she understands rural life well.

Remember: = “because of THIS, therefore...” (“because” + “this”) — it introduces the *effect*. Formal cousin of ; pairs with a / cause.

Watch out

- It leads the *result* clause — the cause comes first, then + effect.

20 Complements

20.1 + — “up; gather; start to”

The complement does three everyday jobs. Literally “**up**” (“stand up”); figuratively “**gather / put away**” (“tidy away,” “save up,” “hide”); and “**start to**” (“burst into song”). The “gather” sense loves a sentence.

Structure: Verb + · + Object + Verb +

{zh: |bǎ / |nǐ|your / |de / |wán jù|toys / |dōu|all / |shōu|put / |qǐ lái|away / 。 }

Put all your toys away.

{zh: |dà jiā|everyone / |chàng|start / |qǐ lái|singing / , |tiào|start / |qǐ lái|dancing / ! }

Everyone, start singing and dancing!

Remember: picture as “**up and into action**”: literal up (), gather *up* and stow away (,), and *kick off* an action (, “it comes *up* to mind = recall”). The gather sense pairs with .

Watch out

- (“recall”) vs (“think up”) — the complement changes the meaning; don’t swap them.

20.2 + / — direction complements

Add (“towards me”) or (“away from me”) to show **which way** the action moves relative to the speaker. They fuse into compounds — , , , .

Structure: Verb + / · Verb + compound

{zh: |wǒ|I’m / |zài / |lóu shàng|upstairs / , |nǐ|you / |shàng lái|come up / 。 }

I’m upstairs — come up.

{zh: |kě yǐ|may / |dài|bring / |péng you|friends / |guò lái|over / |ma / ? }

Can I bring some friends over?

Remember: = **toward me**, = **away from me** (“come in” / “go in”). The trap: a place object slots *between* the verb and / — / , never .

Watch out

- That place-in-the-middle rule is the classic slip: ✓, ×.

20.3 / + — “start to / seems”

A second life for . After an **adjective**, it marks a quality **beginning to set in** — “starts to get ...” After a **perception verb**, it means “(seems) ... when you do it” — (“looks”), (“sounds”), (“tastes”).

Structure: Adjective + + . Perception verb + + Adjective

{zh: |tiān qì|the weather / |rè|hot / |qǐ lái|getting / |le / 。 }

The weather's starting to get hot.

{zh: |tā|he / |kàn|looks / |qǐ lái / |hěn|very / |yǒu hǎo|friendly / 。 }

He looks very friendly.

Remember: Adj + = a change **CATCHING** (“turning hot”); // + = “looks/sounds/tastes.” The first catches right at the moment it starts; the second is the sense-verb frame.

Watch out

- Adj + marks the *onset*, so it usually closes with (“starting to...now”).

20.4 + / + — potential complements

Slot (“can”) or (“can't”) between a verb and its result to say whether that result is **achievable**. They're built from result complements (, , ,). The object can follow the complement or be fronted.

Structure: Verb + / + Complement

{zh: |nǐ|you / |tīng|hear / |de|can / |dǒng|understand / |Shàng hǎi huà|Shanghainese / |ma / ? }

Can you understand Shanghainese?

{zh: |zhè zhǒng|this kind of / |shǒu jī|phone / |xiàn zài|now / |mǎi|buy / |bù|can't / |dào|get / |le / 。 }

You can't get this kind of phone any more.

Remember: = **can**, = **can't**, **wedged into the verb** (/ , /). It asks whether you can *reach the result* — different from (“be allowed / have the chance”).

Watch out

- Negate with the form, not + verb: ✓ (more natural than).

21 Conditional Statements

21.1 ... — “as long as”

... gives a **sufficient** condition — “as long as A, then B.” A on its own is **enough** to guarantee B (even if it isn’t the only route there).

Structure: + Condition , + Result

{zh: |zhǐ yào|as long as / |nǐ|you / |nǚ lì|hard / |xué xí|study / , |jiù|then / |huì|will / |yǒu|make / |jìn bù|progress / 。 }

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

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

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

Remember: lock the pairs: = “**enough → then**” (**sufficient**); = “**the only way → then**” (**necessary**). reaches for , reaches for .

Watch out

- Swapping for quietly turns “as long as” into “only if” — mind the partner.

21.2 ... / ... — “unless”

means “unless.” Two common frames: **Result**, + **Condition** (“won’t X unless Y”), and **X**, **Y** (“only if X, then Y”). It often partners / (“otherwise”). All the weight falls on the one needed condition.

Structure: Result , + Condition · + Condition , + Result

{zh: |wǒ|I / |bù|won’t / |qù|go / , |chú fēi|unless / |nǐ|you / |yě|too / |qù|go / 。 }

I won’t go unless you go too.

{zh: |chú fēi|only if / |lǎo bǎn|the boss / |gěi|gives / |wǒ|me / |jiā xīn|a raise / , |wǒ|I / |cái|then / |huì|will / |liú xià lái|stay / 。 }

Only if the boss gives me a raise will I stay.

Remember: = “**the one exception that changes things.**” = “only if ... then”; = “unless ..., otherwise” It’s a close kin of, both spotlighting the single needed condition.

Watch out

- ... and ... point opposite ways — leads to the good result, to the bad alternative.

22 Noun Phrases

22.1 () + — “all (the)”

before a noun means “all of, every single” — the whole set, usually a sizable one. It pairs with in the predicate, the is usually present, and — crucially — you negate it with , not .

Structure: + () + Noun + ...

{zh: |suǒ yǒu|all / |rén|the people / |dōu / |zǒu|left / |le / |ma / ? }

Has everyone left?

{zh: |wǒ men|our / |xué xiào|school / |suǒ yǒu|all / |de / |lǎo shī|teachers / |dōu / |huì|can / |shuō|speak / |Yīng wén|English / 。 }

All the teachers at our school can speak English.

Remember: ... = “every single one” (stronger than a bare). To say “not all,” negate the whole with : ... (“not everyone...”), never ... (which means “none of them...”).

Watch out

- (“none go”) vs (“not all go”) — where the / sits flips the meaning.

22.2 — “one of (the) ...”

at the **end** of a noun phrase means “one of the ...” — a single member of a named group. It very often follows a (“most”) phrase. The is archaic (“of”), but the phrase is everyday, even in speech.

Structure: Subject + + [Noun Phrase] +

{zh: |tā|she / |shì|is / |wǒ|my / |zuì hǎo|best / |de / |péng you|friends / |zhī yī|one of / 。 }

She is one of my best friends.

{zh: |zhè|this / |shì|is / |shì jiè shàng|in the world / |zuì|biggest / |dà / |de / |chéng shì|cities / |zhī yī|one of / 。 }

This is one of the biggest cities in the world.

Remember: = “one OF (them),” bolted onto the **END** (). is old-style “of,” so read it as “[group] — of which, one.” Note the plural noun: “one of my best friends.”

Watch out

- It tacks onto the tail of the phrase, never the front: ... ✓, not

22.3 + Number + MW + Noun — “the other(s), another”

(or) singles out the **remaining or a different** member — “(the) other, another.” There’s no after it, and it’s often followed by . Use bare for a singular ().

Structure: + Number + Measure Word + Noun · + + MW + Noun

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yǒu|have / |liǎng|two / |ge / |shǒu jī|phones / , |yí ge|one / |shì|is / |Xiǎo mǐ|Xiaomi / , |lìng|the other / |yí ge / |shì|is / iPhone / 。 }

I have two phones — one’s a Xiaomi, the other’s an iPhone.

{zh: |yí tài|one / |zì jǐ|herself / |zhù|lives in / , |lìng|the other / |yí tài / |zū|rents / |chū qù|out / |le / 。 }

She lives in one (flat) and rents the other out.

Remember: / = “the OTHER one” — and NO (✓, not). For a singular, just : , . Pairs beautifully with (“one... the other...”).

Watch out

- Don’t add : ✓, means something looser (“other people”).

23 Sentence Patterns

23.1 + + + / + — “didn’t even”

Repeat a verb around ... + / to stress that the most basic action **didn’t even** happen — “didn’t even ...” Add for “without even ...ing, (then) ...”

Structure: + Verb + + / + (same) Verb (,)

{zh: |zhè ge rén|this person / |wǒ|I / |lián|even / |jiàn|met / |dōu / |méi|haven’t / |jiàn guo|met / 。 }

I’ve never even met this person.

{zh: |tā|he / |lián|even / |shuō|say / |dōu / |bù|didn’t / |shuō|say / |jiù|just / |zǒu|left / |le / 。 }

He left without even saying a word.

Remember: ... + the verb **REPEATED** maxes the emphasis — (“never even met”). Tack on for “without even ...ing, then...”: (“left without even asking”).

Watch out

- The repeat is what does the work — , not .

23.2 ... — “for the sake of”

A B ties a **purpose** to the action done for it — “do B for the sake of A.” It’s formal; the everyday swap is → . Negate with

Structure: Subject + + Goal + + Action

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |wèi|for / |mèng xiǎng|our dreams / |ér / |nǚ lì|strive / 。 }

We strive for our dreams.

{zh: |bú yào|don’t / |wèi le|for / |bié rén|other people / |ér / |huó|live / 。 }

Don’t live for other people.

Remember: (goal) (action) = “for the sake of ... , (one) does ...”. elegantly bridges the *why* to the *what*. It’s the formal cousin of ; in speech you’d more often just say .

Watch out

- This reads *wèi* (“for”) — the goal comes first, the action after .

23.3 + + / — “any (at all)”

means “any (at all), whatsoever”; with / it sweeps over **every** case — “any ... at all.” It takes no , and it’s more emphatic and formal than .

Structure: + Noun + / + Predicate

{zh: |rèn hé|any / |rén|person / |dōu|at all / |bù|can’t / |néng / |shuō fú|persuade / |tā|him / 。 }

No one at all can persuade him.

{zh: |zhè lǐ|here / |rèn hé|any / |chē|vehicle / |dōu|at all / |bù|can’t / |kě yǐ / |tōng guò|pass / 。 }

No vehicle at all may pass here.

Remember: = emphatic “any whatsoever” + / — and NO (✓, not). It’s the stronger, more formal sibling of (hits harder than /).

Watch out

- It always wants a / to complete the sweep — ..., not a bare

23.4 ... / ... — “both ... and ...”

A B stacks two qualities that **both** hold — “both ... and ...” A and B should match in form (both adjectives, ideally both the same length). It’s a more formal version of
.....

Structure: + A + / + B

{zh: |zhè jiā|this / |cān tīng|restaurant / |jì|both / |pián yi|cheap / |yòu|and / |hǎo chī|tasty / 。 }

This restaurant is both cheap and tasty.

{zh: |tā|he / |zuò|does / |shì qing|things / |jì|both / |kuài|fast / |yòu|and / |hǎo|well / 。 }

He does things both quickly and well.

Remember: **A B** = “both A and B,” and A and B should **MATCH** (same length/type) — , . It’s the dressed-up; opens, / follows.

Watch out

- Mismatched halves read awkwardly — keep A and B parallel (both two-syllable, both adjectives).

23.5 ... / / / — locations

+ **place** + / / / says **where** something sits relative to an object. The position word comes **after** the place noun — English “on the table” becomes (“at table-on”). Big places (countries, cities) need no position word.

Structure: + Location + / / /

{zh: |nǐ|your / |de / |shǒu jī|phone / |zài|is in / |bāo|the bag / |lǐ / |ma / ? }

Is your phone in the bag?

{zh: |chāo shì|the supermarket / |zài|is / |wǒ jiā|my house / |páng biān|next to / 。 }

The supermarket is next to my house.

Remember: the position word comes **AFTER** the place — , , — the mirror of English “on/in the ...”. And **big places take no position word:** ✓ (never).

Watch out

- A bare is incomplete — you need the / / to anchor it.

24 Basic/Simple Sentence Patterns

24.1 ... — “even”

... () spotlights a surprising case — “even ...” The catch English speakers miss: you must keep **both** parts (English drops to just “even”). The highlighted item — even an object — jumps to the **front**.

Structure: + Subject / Object + (+ /) + Verb

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|question / |tài|so / |jiǎn dān|simple / |le / , |lián|even / |sān suì|a three-year-old / |xiǎo hái|child / |dōu|even / |zhī dào|knows / 。 }

This is so easy that even a three-year-old knows it.

{zh: |tā|he / |shén me|anything / |dōu / |chī|eats / , |lián|even / |gǒu ròu|dog meat / |dōu|even / |chī|eats / 。 }

He eats anything — even dog meat.

Remember: **X** = “even **X**” — and you need **BOTH** words. English keeps only “even”; Chinese frames it as (the surprising item) ... (sweeps it in). The item leaps to the front: , never .

Watch out

- Dropping the breaks it — always needs its / partner.

24.2 + — “every / any”

A question word + sweeps over **all** cases — “everyone, anything, anywhere, whenever.” Add / and it flips to the total negative: “none, nothing, nowhere.”

Structure: Question Word + + Predicate

{zh: |shéi|everyone / |dōu / |xǐ huan|likes / |měi shí|good food / 。 }

Everyone loves good food.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |nǎr|anywhere / |dōu / |bù|don’t / |xiǎng|want / |qù|to go / 。 }

I don’t want to go anywhere.

Remember: question word + = “all / every”; + / = “none / nothing.” (everyone), (everything), (everywhere), (no matter how) — then a / turns each into its negative ().

Watch out

- The question word here is the indefinite “any,” not a real question — no question mark.

24.3 A + + B + + Number + — “N times as much”

counts multiples — “A B N ” = “A is N times B.” Watch the maths: **N is the total**, $\times N$ — is “three times (as much),” *not* “three times *more*.”

Structure: A + + B + + Number +

{zh: |tā|his / |xiàn zài|now / |de / |gōng zī|salary / |shì|is / |liǎng nián qián|two years ago / |de / |sān bèi|three times / 。 }

His salary is now three times what it was two years ago.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |chéng shì|city's / |de / |rén kǒu|population / |shì|is / |nà ge|that one's / |de / |liǎng bèi|twice / 。 }

This city's population is twice that one's.

Remember: N = the **TOTAL** ($\times N$), not “N times more.” = $3\times$, = $2\times$ (twice). The ... frame brackets the two things compared.

Watch out

- (“increased threefold”) is read ambiguously in real life — be careful with it in maths contexts.

24.4 + / + ... — “not ... at all”

+ / + / is the emphatic, absolute negative — “not (even) ... at all, not one bit.”

Structure: Subject + + / + / + Adjective / Verb

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yì diǎn|at all / |yě / |bù|not / |pàng|fat / 。 }

You're not fat at all.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yì diǎn|at all / |dōu / |méi|didn't / |tīng dǒng|understand / 。 }

I didn't understand a single bit.

Remember: it's the / **sitting between and** / that makes it absolute — “not even the smallest bit.” A bare / (no /) is noticeably weaker.

Watch out

- Keep all the pieces: + / + / — drop the / and the “at all” force fades.

24.5 ... — “not sure what’s best”

End a clause with 后 after 和 you get “(I) don’t know what would be best” — that stuck, can’t-decide feeling. It’s often 很 .

Structure: Subject + 很 + Question Phrase + 呢

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zhēn de|really / |bù zhī dào|don’t know / |zěn me bàn|what to do / |cái / |hǎo|best / 呢 }

I really don’t know what would be best to do.

{zh: |bù zhī dào|not sure / |sòng|to give / |shén me|what / |lǐ wù|gift / |hǎo|best / 呢 }

Not sure what gift would be best.

Remember: the trailing 呢 = “...would be best” — (“don’t know what on earth to do for the best”). The sharpens the dilemma.

Watch out

- The 呢 sits at the very end, after the question phrase — it’s “what’s *best*,” not “good.”

24.6 ... / — “for ..., generally speaking”

+ 对 person + 呢 means “for / as far as someone is concerned”; 一般来说 means “generally speaking.” Both open a sentence to frame the viewpoint that follows.

Structure: 对 Person + 呢 一般来说 呢

{zh: |duì|for / |wǒ|me / |lái shuō|as far as concerned / 呢 , |jiàn kāng|health / |zuì|the most / |zhòng yào|important / 呢 }

For me, health matters most.

{zh: |yì bān lái shuō|generally speaking / 呢 , |sī lì xué xiào|private schools / |dōu / |bǐ jiào|fairly / |guì|expensive / 呢 }

Generally speaking, private schools are fairly pricey.

Remember: X = “from X’s angle”; 一般来说 = “as a rule.” Both are sentence-openers that set the frame. A cousin: 举个例子 = “take ... as an example.”

Watch out

- It’s ..., not 呢 ... — the 呢 is part of the fixed frame.

25 Complex Sentence Patterns

25.1 + + , ... — conceding a point

The frame **Adj Adj, ...** grudgingly **concedes** a quality before pulling back — “(it’s) ... alright, but” It’s a debater’s move: admit the point, then keep your reservation.

Structure: Adjective + + (same) Adjective , /

{zh: |gōng zuò|work / |máng|busy / |shì / |máng|busy / , |dàn shì|but / |wǒ|I’m / |hěn|very / |kāi xīn|happy / 。 }

Work may be busy, but I’m very happy.

{zh: |zhè jiàn|this / |yī fu|outfit / |hǎo kàn|nice-looking / |shì / |hǎo kàn|nice-looking / , |jiù shì|it’s just / |bù|doesn’t / |shì hé|suit / |wǒ|me / 。 }

This outfit looks nice alright — it just doesn’t suit me.

Remember: the **doubled adjective concedes** (“busy, sure...”), the / **clause delivers the catch**. ... = “busy it may be, but...”. Note: here means “it’s just (that),” not “is.”

Watch out

- The adjective must repeat exactly around : , not .

25.2 ... — “as soon as”

A B binds two events tight — “as soon as A, (then) B,” with B following A at once or automatically. It doubles as “**whenever** A, B” for a habitual link.

Structure: Subject + + Event 1 , + Event 2

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yī|as soon as / |xià kè|class ends / |jiù|then / |qù|go / |chī|eat / |wǔ fàn|lunch / 。 }

I’ll have lunch as soon as class is over.

{zh: |tā|he / |yī|the moment / |hē jiǔ|drinks / |jiù|then / |liǎn hóng|goes red / 。 }

He goes red the moment he drinks.

Remember: **A B** = “**the moment A, B**” — instant, automatic follow-on (...). The two clauses can even have different subjects: (“the moment the teacher came, everyone went quiet”).

Watch out

- Don’t read this as “one” — it’s the “the instant...” trigger, paired with .

25.3 ... — “on one hand ... on the other ...”

... () ... lays out **two sides** of a situation — “on one hand ..., on the other ...” The two sides may agree or pull against each other, and the second often takes / / .

Structure: + A , () + B

{zh: |zì jǐ / |zuò fàn|cooking for yourself / |yì fāng miàn|on one hand / |jiàn kāng|healthy / , |yì fāng miàn|on the other / |hái|also / |néng|can / |shěng qián|save money / 。 }

Cooking for yourself is healthy on one hand, and saves money on the other.

{zh: |tā|he / |yì fāng miàn|on one hand / |xiǎng|wants to / |gǎi biàn|change / , |yì fāng miàn|on the other / |yòu|yet / |hài pà|fears / |gǎi biàn|change / 。 }

On one hand he wants to change; on the other, he's afraid of it.

Remember: **weighs two sides** — = “side / aspect.” The sides can agree (two perks) or clash (want vs fear); a clashing second side often carries (“yet”).

Watch out

- The second one can take () for extra clarity — both forms are fine.

26 Not only... but also...

26.1 / / ... / / ... — “not only ... but also ...”

Several near-identical frames all mean “**not only A, but also B**”: / / up front, paired with / / behind. Mix and match freely — they’re alike in meaning, and B should push *further* than A.

Structure: Subject + / / + A , / / + B

{zh: |Wáng shī fu|Master Wang / |bú dàn|not only / |huì|can / |kāi chē|drive / ,
|hái|but also / |huì|can / |xiū chē|fix cars / 。 }

Master Wang not only drives — he can repair cars too.

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |bù jǐn|not only / |wán chéng|finished / |le / |rèn wù|the task / ,
|ér qiě|but also / |tí qián|ahead of schedule / |le / |shí tiān|by ten days / 。 }

We not only finished the task, but did so ten days early.

Remember: front + back, pick any pair: / / ($\approx$ “not only”) with / / ($\approx$ “but also”). / ring a touch more formal; B must *escalate* past A. If the subject changes, put it **after** the conjunction: ..., ...

Watch out

- Keep both halves — Chinese says “not only... but also...” in full, where casual English might drop one.

27 Comparing similar adverbs

27.1 vs — “originally” two ways

Both can translate as “originally,” but they part ways. = “originally / in the first place,” usually setting up that things **later changed**. = “**so it turns out**” — a fresh realisation — or “(it was) ... all along.”

{zh: |wǒ|I / |běn lái|originally / |yào|was going / |qù|to go / |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / ,
|dàn shì|but / |qù bu liǎo|couldn't / |le / 。 }

I was originally going to Shanghai, but then I couldn't.

{zh: |yuán lái|so / |nǐ|you / |shì|are / |lǎo shī|a teacher / |a / ! }

Oh, so you're a teacher!

Remember: looks back at a plan that **CHANGED** (“originally... but”); reports a **DISCOVERY** (“oh, so that's it!”). Tagline forms seal it: = “of course, all along”; = “ah, so that's how it is!”

Watch out

- If nothing changed and you mean “it turns out,” it's , never .

27.2 vs — “often” two ways

is plain “**often**” — a frequency, and it can describe future plans. is “**tend(s) to / as a rule**” — a pattern or tendency under certain conditions, and it **can't** describe a future intention.

{zh: |tā|he / |cháng cháng|often / |chí dào|arrives late / 。 }

He often arrives late.

{zh: |yǒu qián rén|rich people / |wǎng wǎng|tend to be / |bǐ jiào|relatively / |mí xìn|superstitious / 。 }

Rich people tend to be more superstitious.

Remember: = “**often**” (a count, future-friendly); = “**tends to**” (a law-like pattern, no future). Test it: ✓ (“I'll exercise often from now on”), but × there — a tendency can't be a plan.

Watch out

- can shorten to (); can't drop a .

27.3 vs — adverb vs time word

is an **adverb** (“just,” right before the verb); is a **time noun** (“a moment ago,” within the last few minutes) that can stand alone and even modify a noun.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |gāng cái|a moment ago / |qù|went / |nǎr|where / |le / ? }

Where did you go just now?

{zh: |wǒ|I / |gāng|just / |huí lái|got back / 。 }

I just got back.

Remember: = adverb, glued to the verb (, often no); = noun, a point in the recent past (stands alone, takes , modifies nouns:). Before an adjective, only / works (, “the sky just cleared”).

Watch out

- is a *time word* — (“the thing just now”) works, but doesn’t.

28 Comparing similar prepositions

28.1 vs — “about” vs “towards / regarding”

Both point at a person or thing, but from different angles. introduces the **topic / subject matter** (“about, on the subject of”). introduces the **target of an attitude or action** (“towards, with regard to”) — usually with a view or conclusion attached.

{zh: |guān yú|about / |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|question / , |dà jiā|everyone / |yǒu|has / |shén me|what / |kàn fǎ|views / ? }

On this question, what are everyone’s thoughts?

{zh: |duì yú|with / |wǒ men|our / |de / |gōng zuò|work / , |lǎo bǎn|the boss / |hěn|very / |mǎn yì|satisfied / 。 }

The boss is very satisfied with our work.

Remember: = the **TOPIC** (“about X”); = the **TARGET** of a feeling/action (“towards X”). If a view or reaction is attached (satisfied with, strict about), it’s ; if you’re just naming the subject, it’s .

Watch out

- Where only a topic is meant, the two overlap (/ ...) — the split bites when an attitude is involved.

28.2 vs — “distance from” vs “starting from”

measures the **gap** between two points — “away from” (for distance). marks a **starting point** in space or time — “from” (where motion or time *begins*).

{zh: |cóng|from / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |kāi shǐ|on / , |wǒ|I / |bù|won’t / |chōu yān|smoke / |le / 。 }

Starting from tomorrow, I’m quitting smoking.

{zh: |wǒ jiā|my home / |lǐ|from / |gōng sī|the office / |hěn|very / |jìn|close / 。 }

My home is very close to the office.

Remember: = the **GAP** (“how far apart,” pairs with /); = the **START** (“where it begins”). (“close to”) vs (“starting tomorrow”). Distance → ; origin point → .

Watch out

- needs two endpoints and a distance word (.../); needs a route or a start time (...).

29 Comparing similar separate functions

29.1 vs — “instead” vs “the opposite”

is an **adverb** (“instead, on the contrary”) that sits before the verb inside one sentence. is an **adjective / conjunction** meaning “(the) opposite” — it links or opens a sentence, or describes a thing as opposite.

{zh: |chī|eating / |shuǐ guǒ|fruit / |bú dàn|not only / |méi|no / |hǎo chu|benefit / ,
|fǎn ér|instead / |yǒu|has / |huài chu|harm}

Eating fruit not only does no good — instead it does harm.

{zh: |wǒ|my / |de / |xiǎng fǎ|idea / |gēn / |tā|his / |xiāng fǎn|the opposite / 。 }

My idea is the opposite of his.

Remember: = an **ADVERB** (“instead,” before the verb), marking a **contrary RESULT**; = “the opposite” (... , or ... “on the contrary,”). One does a job inside the clause; the other names or links an opposite.

Watch out

- You can’t swap them: ✓ (adverb), ✓ (adjective) — but not .

29.2 vs vs — “sure / certainly”

Three “certainty” words, three jobs: = “definitely / to affirm” (a confident assertion). = “be sure / confirm” — certainty you’ve **checked**. = “certainly / be sure to” — an **expectation or insistence**.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |què dìng|sure / |tā|he / |huì|will / |lái|come / |ma / ? }

Are you sure he’ll come?

{zh: |tā|he / |kěn dìng|definitely / |huì|will / |lái|come / 。 }

He’ll definitely come.

Remember: asserts a fact confidently; is certainty you’ve **VERIFIED**; is **expectation/insistence**. = “will *surely* come” (expectation); = “be *sure* to be careful” (insistence); = “are you *sure* (have you checked)?”.

Watch out

- is about *your own* checked certainty; asserts the fact itself.

29.3 vs — “to suit” vs “suitable”

Same two characters, flipped — and the flip changes the grammar. 是 a **verb** (“to suit”) and takes an object. 合适 is an **adjective** (“suitable”) and behaves like other adjectives (,).

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |yán sè|colour / |bù|doesn't / |shì hé|suit / |tā|him / 。 }

This colour doesn't suit him.

{zh: |hēi sè|black / |cái|is / |shì / |zuì|the most / |hé shì|suitable / |de / 。 }

Black is the most suitable.

Remember: 适合 = **VERB** + object (, “suits me”); 合适 = **ADJECTIVE** (, , no object). The character order is the giveaway: 适合 takes an object, 合适 describes.

Watch out

- Don't give an object: ✓ but × → / .

30 Comparing similar time words

30.1 vs — “after” vs “when / while”

Both attach to a time or event, but they pin different moments. means “**after** (something)” — the action follows it. means “**when / while** (something is happening)” — the action lands *during* it.

{zh: |dǎ|playing / |lán qiú|basketball / |de shí hou|while / |huì|will / |chū hàn|sweat / 。 }

You sweat while playing basketball.

{zh: |dǎ wán|after finishing / |lán qiú|basketball / |yǐ hòu|after / |yào|need to / |xǐ zǎo|shower / 。 }

After finishing basketball, you need to shower.

Remember: = **DURING (when/while);** = **AFTER.** The verb tells you which: an *ongoing* verb takes (), a *completed* one takes () — note the result word that signals “finished.”

Watch out

- (“while eating”) vs (“after eating”) — the is the tell that you’ve crossed into territory.