

Complements

Ref Hsk4 Grammar

动词 + 起来 — “up; gather; start to”

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

Structure: Verb + 起来 · 把 + Object + Verb + 起来

{zh: 把 |bǎ / 你 |nǐ|your / 的 |de / 玩具 |wán jù|toys / 都 |dōu|all / 收 |shōu|put / 起来 |qǐ lái|away / 。 }

Put all your toys away.

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

Everyone, start singing and dancing!

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

Watch out

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

动词 + 来 / 去 — direction complements

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

Structure: Verb + 来 / 去 · Verb + compound

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

I’m upstairs — come up.

{zh: 可以 |kě yǐ|may / 带 |dài|bring / 朋友 |péng you|friends / 过来 |guò lái|over / 吗 |ma / ? }

Can I bring some friends over?

Remember: **来** = toward me, **去** = away from me (进来 “come in” / 进去 “go in”). The trap: a **place** object slots *between* the verb and 来 / 去 — 回美国去 / 回美国, never 回去美国.

Watch out

- That place-in-the-middle rule is the classic slip: 回家来 ✓, 回来家 ×.

动词 / 形容词 + 起来 — “start to / seems”

A second life for **起来**. 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” — 看起来 (“looks”), 听起来 (“sounds”), 吃起来 (“tastes”).

Structure: Adjective + 起来 + 了 · Perception verb + 起来 + Adjective

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

The weather’s starting to get hot.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 看 |kàn|looks / 起来 |qǐ lái / 很 |hěn|very / 友好 |yǒu hǎo|friendly / 。 }

He looks very friendly.

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

Watch out

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

动词 + 得 / 不 + 结果 — potential complements

Slot **得** (“can”) or **不** (“can’t”) between a verb and its result to say whether that result is **achievable**. They’re built from result complements (懂, 完, 到, 见, 清楚). The object can follow the complement or be fronted.

Structure: Verb + 得 / 不 + Complement

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 听 |tīng|hear / 得 |de|can / 懂 |dǒng|understand / 上海话 |Shàng hǎi huà|Shanghainese / 吗 |ma / ? }

Can you understand Shanghainese?

{zh: 这种 |zhè zhǒng|this kind of / 手机 |shǒu jī|phone / 现在 |xiàn zài|now / 买 |mǎi|buy / 不 |bù|can’t / 到 |dào|get / 了 |le / 。 }

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

Remember: 得 = can, 不 = can't, wedged into the verb (听得懂 / 听不懂, 做得完 / 做不完). It asks whether you can *reach the result* — different from 能 (“be allowed / have the chance”).

Watch out

- Negate with the 不 form, not 不能 + verb: 看不懂 ✓ (more natural than 不能看懂).