

Comparing similar adverbs

Ref Hsk4 Grammar

本来 vs 原来 — “originally” two ways

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

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 本来 |běn lái|originally / 要 |yào|was going / 去 |qù|to go / 上海 |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / , 但是 |dàn shì|but / 去不了 |qù bù liǎo|couldn't / 了 |le / 。 }

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

{zh: 原来 |yuán lái|so / 你 |nǐ|you / 是 |shì|are / 老师 |lǎo shī|a teacher / 啊 |a / ! }

Oh, so you're a teacher!

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

Watch out

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

常常 vs 往往 — “often” two ways

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

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

He often arrives late.

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

Rich people tend to be more superstitious.

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

Watch out

- 常常 can shorten to 常 (常去); 往往 can't drop a 往.

刚 vs 刚才 — adverb vs time word

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

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 刚才 |gāng cái|a moment ago / 去 |qù|went / 哪儿 |nǎr|where / 了 |le / ? }

Where did you go just now?

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

I just got back.

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

Watch out

- 刚才 is a *time word* — 刚才的事 (“the thing just now”) works, but 刚的事 doesn't.