

Comparing similar separate functions

Ref Hsk4 Grammar

反而 vs 相反—”instead” vs ”the opposite”

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

{zh: 吃 |chī|eating / 水果 |shuǐ guǒ|fruit / 不但 |bú dàn|not only / 没 |méi|no / 好处 |hǎo chu|benefit / , 反而 |fǎn ér|instead / 有 |yǒu|has / 坏处 |huài chu|harm}

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

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 的 |de / 想法 |xiǎng fǎ|idea / 跟 |gēn / 他 |tā|his / 相反 |xiāng fǎn|the opposite / 。 }

My idea is the opposite of his.

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

Watch out

- You can’t swap them: 反而有坏处 (adverb), 跟他相反 (adjective) —but not 跟他反而.

肯定 vs 确定 vs 一定—”sure / certainly”

Three ”certainty” words, three jobs: **肯定** = ”definitely / to affirm” (a confident assertion). **确定** = ”be sure / confirm” —certainty you’ve **checked**. **一定** = ”certainly / be sure to” —an **expectation or insistence**.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 确定 |què dìng|sure / 他 |tā|he / 会 |huì|will / 来 |lái|come / 吗 |ma / ? }

Are you sure he’ll come?

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

He’ll definitely come.

Remember: **肯定** asserts a fact confidently; **确定** is certainty you’ve **VERIFIED**; **一定** is **expectation/insistence**. 一定会来 = ”will *surely* come” (expectation); 一定要小心 = ”be *sure* to be careful” (insistence); 你确定吗? = ”are you *sure* (have you checked)?”.

Watch out

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

适合 vs 合适 — “to suit” vs “suitable”

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

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

This colour doesn't suit him.

{zh: 黑色 |hēi sè|black / 才 |cái|is / 是 |shì / 最 |zuì|the most / 合适 |hé shì|suitable / 的 |de / 。 }

Black is the most suitable.

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

Watch out

- Don't give 合适 an object: 这个适合你 but 这个合适你 → 这个对你很合适 / 这个很合适.