

Comparing similar time words

Ref Hsk4 Grammar

以后 vs 的时候—”after” vs ”when / while”

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

{zh: 打 |dǎ|playing / 篮球 |lán qiú|basketball / 的时候 |de shí hou|while / 会 |huì|will / 出汗 |chū hàn|sweat / 。 }

You sweat while playing basketball.

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

After finishing basketball, you need to shower.

Remember: 的时候 = DURING (when/while); 以后 = AFTER. The verb tells you which: an *ongoing* verb takes 的时候 (打篮球的时候), a *completed* one takes 以后 (打完以后) —note the result word 完 that signals ”finished.”

Watch out

- 吃饭的时候 (”while eating”) vs 吃完饭以后 (”after eating”) —the 完 is the tell that you’ve crossed into 以后 territory.