

HSK 4 Grammar

English edition

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1 Adjectives

1.1 全 + 名词 — “the whole, entire”

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

Structure: 全 + Noun + 都 + Predicate

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

Our whole family has been to Beijing.

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 地方 |dì fang|place / 全年 |quán nián|all year / 都 |dōu| / 很 |hěn|very / 热 |rè|hot / 。 }

This place is hot all year round.

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

Watch out

- It attaches only to “whole” nouns (身, 家, 国, 校, 年 ...).
- Advanced flip: 全都不去 = “none go at all”; 不全都去 = “not all go” — where 不 sits changes everything.

1.2 形容词 + 死了 — “... to death, extremely”

死了 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 + 死了

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

I’m starving!

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

I’m exhausted today!

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

This outfit is hideous.

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

Watch out

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

2 Adverbs

2.1 差不多 — “about the same, more or less”

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

Structure: Subject + 差不多 · A + 跟 / 和 + B + 差不多

{zh: 这 |zhè|these / 两个 |liǎng ge|two / 词 |cí|words / 的 |de / 意思 |yì si|meanings / 差不多 |chà bu duō|about the same / 。 }

These two words mean about the same thing.

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

Shanghai and New York are much the same.

Remember: 差 (difference) 不 (not) 多 (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)”: 差不多了 (“that’s about enough”), 差不多十点 (“around ten”).
- For several items, add 都: 这几个都差不多.

2.2 看来 — “it seems, apparently”

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

Structure: 看来 + Judgement · 在 + Person + 看来

{zh: 看来 |kàn lái|it seems / 他 |tā|he / 不 |bù|not / 来 |lái|coming / 了 |le / 。 }

It seems he’s not coming.

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

In my view, this plan won’t work.

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

Watch out

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

2.3 正好 — “just right, as it happens”

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

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

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 来 |lái|came / 了 |le / ! 我 |wǒ|I / 正好 |zhèng hǎo|was just about to / 要 |yào / 找 |zhǎo|look for / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

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

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

This outfit is just the right size.

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

Watch out

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

2.4 只好 — “have no choice but to”

只好 is the **only option left** — 只 (only) + 好 (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 +) 只好 + Verb Phrase

{zh: 餐厅 |cān tīng|the restaurants / 都 |dōu|all / 关门 |guān mén|closed / 了 |le / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 只好 |zhǐ hǎo|had no choice but to / 去 |qù|go / 吃 |chī|eat / 快餐 |kuài cān|fast food / 。 }

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

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 忘 |wàng|forgot / 了 |le / 预约 |yù yuē|to book / , 只好 |zhǐ hǎo|so had to / 去 |qù|go / 排队 |pái duì|queue / 。 }

I forgot to book, so I had to queue.

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

Watch out

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

2.5 又 + 不 / 没 — emphatic negation

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

Structure: 又 + 不 / 没 + Predicate

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

Why ask me? It’s not as if I’d know.

{zh: 这些 |zhè xiē|these / 菜 |cài|dishes / 又 |yòu|it’s not as if / 没 |méi|haven’t / 坏 |huài|gone off / , 为什么 |wèi shén me|why / 要 |yào / 扔 |rēng|throw out / ? }

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

Remember: 又 + 不/没 = the “it’s-not-as-if” shrug (又不是, 又没 ...) — a verbal eye-roll defending yourself. It is *not* the “again” 又, 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 可 + 形容词 + 了 — emphatic “really, so”

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

Structure: 可 + Adjective + 了

{zh: 这只 |zhè zhī|this / 小狗 |xiǎo gǒu|puppy / 可 |kě|so / 淘气 |táo qì|naughty / 了 |le / ! }

This puppy is so naughty!

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 可 |kě|really / 优秀 |yōu xiù|impressive / 了 |le / ! }

He’s really impressive!

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

Watch out

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

2.7 原来 — “originally; so it turns out”

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

Structure: 原来 + 的 + Noun · Subject + 原来 + Predicate

{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!

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

We originally lived in Pudong.

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

Watch out

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

2.8 差点 (儿) — “almost (and didn’t)”

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

Structure: Subject + 差点 (+ 就) + Predicate (+ 了)

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

The car almost hit me (it didn’t).

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

I was almost late today.

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

Watch out

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

2.9 从来 + 都 — “always, all along”

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

Structure: Subject + 从来 + 都 (是) + Predicate

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

He’s always been like this.

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

I never drink.

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

Watch out

- Don’t drop the 都 in the positive: 从来都很努力 ✓, not 从来很努力.

2.10 结果 — “as a result, in the end”

As a connector, **结果** (“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 , 结果 + Result

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 穿 |chuān|dressed / 得 |de / 很 |hěn|very / 少 |shǎo|lightly / , 结果 |jié guǒ|as a result / 感冒 |gǎn mào|caught a cold / 了 |le / 。 }

She dressed too lightly and ended up catching a cold.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 开 |kāi|drove / 得 |de / 太 |tài|too / 快 |kuài|fast / , 结果 |jié guǒ|as a result / 撞到 |zhuàng dào|hit / 了 |le / 人 |rén|someone / 。 }

He drove too fast and ended up hitting someone.

Remember: 结果 = “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”): 考试结果 (“the exam results”).

2.11 够 — “enough”

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

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

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 买 |mǎi|bought / 的 |de / 菜 |cài|food / 够 |gòu|enough / 吃 |chī|to eat / 了 |le / 。 }

We bought enough food.

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

I’ve had enough!

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

Watch out

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

2.12 甚至 — “even, to the point that”

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

Structure:, 甚至 (连) + **Extreme Case** + 都 / 也 ...

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 太 |tài|too / 忙 |máng|busy / 了 |le / , 甚至 |shèn zhì|even / 吃 |chī|to eat / 午饭 |wǔ fàn|lunch / 的 |de / 时间 |shí jiān|time / 都 |dōu / 没有 |méi yǒu|hasn’t / 。 }

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

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 问题 |wèn tí|question / 很 |hěn|very / 简单 |jiǎn dān|simple / , 甚至 |shèn zhì|even / 连 |lián / 孩子 |hái zi|a child / 都 |dōu / 知道 |zhī dào|knows / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

2.13 还是 + 动词 + 吧 — “had better, after all”

Beyond “or,” 还是 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 吧.

Structure: Subject + 还是 + Verb Phrase + 吧

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

Let’s go tomorrow after all.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 还是 |hái shì|had better / 别 |bié|not / 去 |qù|go / 了 |le / 。 }

You’d better not go.

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

Watch out

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

2.14 最好 — “had better, best to”

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

Structure: Subject + 最好 + Predicate

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 最好 |zuì hǎo|had better / 先 |xiān|first / 休息 |xiū xi|rest / 一下 |yí xià|a bit / 。 }

You’d better rest a bit first.

{zh: 外面 |wài miàn|outside / 冷 |lěng|cold / , 最好 |zuì hǎo|best to / 多 |duō|more / 穿 |chuān|wear / 点 |diǎn / 。 }

It’s cold out — best wear a bit more.

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

Watch out

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

2.15 不得不 — “have to, can’t but”

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

Structure: Subject + 不得不 + Verb

{zh: 电梯 |diàn tī|the lift / 又 |yòu|again / 坏 |huài|broke / 了 |le / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 不得不 |bù dé bù|had to / 爬 |pá|climb / 楼梯 |lóu tī|the stairs / 。 }

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

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 太 |tài|too / 厉害 |lì hai|good / 了 |le / , 我 |wǒ|I / 不得不 |bù dé bù|have to / 承认 |chéng rèn|admit it / 。 }

You’re so good — I have to admit it.

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

Watch out

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

2.16 到底 — “on earth / after all / finally”

到底 = “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 终于).

Structure: 到底 · 到底 + Verb + 了

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

What on earth are you trying to say?

{zh: 天气 |tiān qì|the weather / 到底 |dào dǐ|finally / 暖和 |nuǎn huo|warmed up / 了 |le / 。 }

The weather has finally warmed up.

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

Watch out

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

2.17 究竟 — “exactly, on earth” (formal)

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

Structure: 究竟 + Question Word ...

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

Who on earth is this person?

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

Exactly how much longer do we have to wait?

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

Watch out

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

2.18 刚 — “just (a moment ago)”

The adverb **刚** (or 刚刚) 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 + 刚 + Verb

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

We just found out.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 刚 |gāng|just / 来 |lái|came to / 中国 |Zhōng guó|China / 两个 |liǎng ge|two / 月 |yuè|months ago / 。 }

He came to China just two months ago.

Remember: 刚 = **adverb “just,” glued to the verb (刚到)** — and “two months ago” needs no extra word: 刚来两个月. Don’t mix it up with the *noun* 刚才 (“a moment ago”) — see the comparison file later.

Watch out

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

2.19 一 + 量词 + 一 + 量词 — “one by one”

Double up 一 + **measure word** and you get something happening **one unit at a time** — “one by one, step by step.” 个 is the default measure word, but slot in whichever fits the noun.

Structure: 一 + MW + 一 + MW (+ Noun)

{zh: 别 |bié|don't / 吵 |chǎo|all shout / , 一个 |yí ge|one / 一个 |yí ge|by one / 说 |shuō|speak / 。 }

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

{zh: 孩子 |hái zi|the child / 一天 |yì tiān|day / 一天 |yì tiān|by day / 长大 |zhǎng dà|grows up / 。 }

The child grows up day by day.

Remember: repeat the measure word → “one ____ at a time”: 一个一个 (one by one), 一步一步 (step by step), 一天一天 (day by day), 一遍一遍 (over and over).

Watch out

- Match the measure word to the noun — 一步一步 for steps, 一个一个 for countable things.

2.20 本来 — “originally (but it changed)”

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

Structure: Subject + 本来 (+ 是) ... 的, 但是 ... · 本来就 ...

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 本来 |běn lái|originally / 要 |yào|meant / 去 |qù|to go / 的 |de / , 可是 |kě shì|but / 后来 |hòu lái|then / 病 |bìng|got sick / 了 |le / 。 }

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

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

Moving house is a hassle to begin with.

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

Watch out

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

2.21 就 + 主语 — “only (this one)”

Park **就** in front of the subject or quantity and it spotlights how **little** there is — “only, just (this one).” It often rides with 一个 / 一次.

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

{zh: 大家 |dà jiā|everyone / 都 |dōu / 下班 |xià bān|left work / 了 |le / , 就 |jiù|only / 老板 |lǎo bǎn|the boss / 还 |hái|still / 没 |méi|hasn't / 走 |zǒu|left / 。 }

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

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 就 |jiù|only / 去过 |qù guo|been there / 一次 |yí cì|once / 。 }

I've only been there once.

Remember: like 才 + number, this **就** shrinks things to “only / just” (就老板, 就一次), underlining smallness. It's a different 就 from the “right away / as early as” one.

Watch out

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

2.22 千万 — “be sure to, whatever you do”

千万 (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 别 / 不要 / 要.

Structure: 千万 + (别 / 不要 / 要) + Verb Phrase

{zh: 千万 |qiān wàn|whatever you do / 别 |bié|don't / 忘 |wàng|forget / 了 |le / 带 |dài|to bring / 护照 |hù zhào|your passport / 。 }

Whatever you do, don't forget your passport.

{zh: 路上 |lù shàng|on the way / 千万 |qiān wàn|do be sure to / 要 |yào / 小心 |xiǎo xīn|be careful / 。 }

Do be careful on the way.

Remember: big numbers = big urgency. 千万 piles “thousand” on “ten-thousand” to mean “I really, *really* mean it.” The go-to shape is 千万别 ... (“whatever you do, DON'T...”).

Watch out

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

2.23 恐怕 — “I’m afraid (that), probably”

恐怕 has 恐 (“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 要 / 会.

Structure: (Reason,) 恐怕 + Subject + Predicate

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

I’m afraid it’s going to rain today.

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

I’m afraid I can’t come tomorrow.

Remember: 恐怕 hides 恐 (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 可能 instead.

2.24 竟然 — “unexpectedly, actually”

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

Structure: Subject + 竟然 + Predicate

{zh: 这么 |zhè me|such a / 难 |nán|hard / 的 |de / 题 |tí|problem / , 他 |tā|he / 竟然 |jìng rán|actually / 做 |zuò|got it / 对 |duì|right / 了 |le / 。 }

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

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 竟然 |jìng rán|unexpectedly / 把 |bǎ / 这 |zhè|this / 件 |jiàn / 事 |shì|matter / 忘 |wàng|forgot / 了 |le / 。 }

He actually forgot all about it!

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

Watch out

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

2.25 难道 — rhetorical-question marker

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

Structure: 难道 + Rhetorical Question + 吗?

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

You don’t actually believe him, do you?

{zh: 今天 |jīn tiān|today / 是 |shì|is / 我 |wǒ|my / 的 |de / 生日 |shēng rì|birthday / , 难道 |nán dào|don’t tell me / 你 |nǐ|you / 不 |bù|don’t / 知道 |zhī dào|know / 吗 |ma / ? }

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

Remember: 难道 = 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 难道 ... 吗? .

Watch out

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

2.26 先 ... , 再 ... — “first ... then ...”

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

Structure: 先 + Verb 1 , 再 + Verb 2

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

Wash your hands first, then eat.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 要 |yào|should / 先 |xiān|first / 做 |zuò|do / 作业 |zuò yè|homework / , 再 |zài|then / 看 |kàn|watch / 电视 |diàn shì|TV / 。 }

Do your homework first, then watch TV.

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

Watch out

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

2.27 也都 — “all ... too”

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

Structure: Subject + 也都 + Predicate

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

I’m well, and so is all my family.

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

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

Remember: 也 (also) + 都 (all) in a **FIXED** order — 也都, never 都也. 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 挺 + 形容词 + 的 — “quite, pretty”

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

Structure: 挺 + Adjective + 的

{zh: 你 |nǐ|your / 男朋友 |nán péng you|boyfriend / 挺 |tǐng|pretty / 帅 |shuài|handsome / 的 |de / 。 }

Your boyfriend is pretty handsome.

{zh: 最近 |zuì jìn|lately / 大家 |dà jiā|everyone / 都 |dōu / 挺 |tǐng|quite / 忙 |máng|busy / 的 |de / 。 }

Everyone’s been quite busy lately.

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

Watch out

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

4 Auxiliary Words

4.1 什么的 — “and so on, and the like”

什么的 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) + 什么的

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 奶奶 |nǎi nai|grandma / 只 |zhǐ|only / 吃 |chī|eats / 蔬菜 |shū cài|vegetables / 、豆腐 |dòu fu|tofu / 什么的 |shén me de|and so on / 。 }

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

{zh: 数学 |shù xué|maths / 、物理 |wù lǐ|physics / 什么的 |shén me de|and so on / , 我 |wǒ|I’m / 都 |dōu / 不 |bù|not / 感兴趣 |gǎn xìng qù|interested / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

4.2 等 / 等等 — “etc.”

等 or **等等** 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 (“... 等 + category”).

Structure: A、B、C + 等 / 等等 · A、B 等 + Category

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

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

{zh: 北京 |Běi jīng|Beijing / 、上海 |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / 等 |děng|and other / 城市 |chéng shì|cities }

cities such as Beijing and Shanghai

Remember: 等 / 等等 = formal “etc.” — and **NO comma before it** (Chinese writes 苹果、香蕉等, not 苹果、香蕉, 等). It’s the written, neutral counterpart to the casual 什么的.

Watch out

- 等 can also wrap up *before* a category noun: 北京、上海等城市 (“cities such as ...”).

5 Conjunctions

5.1 不过 — a softer “but”

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

Structure: , 不过

{zh: 这件 |zhè jiàn|this / 衣服 |yī fu|outfit / 我 |wǒ|I / 很 |hěn|really / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|like / , 不过 |bú guò|but / 有点 |yǒu diǎn|a bit / 贵 |guì|pricey / 。 }

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

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

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

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

Watch out

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

5.2 于是 — “and so, thereupon”

于是 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 了, and often with 就.

Structure: , 于是 + 了

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

It suddenly rained yesterday, so we cancelled the picnic.

{zh: 票 |piào|the tickets / 卖光 |mài guāng|sold out / 了 |le / , 于是 |yú shì|so / 我们 |wǒ men|we / 买 |mǎi|bought / 了 |le / 黄牛票 |huáng niú piào|scalped tickets / 。 }

The tickets sold out, so we bought scalped ones.

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

Watch out

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

5.3 还有 — “also, and another thing”

还有 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: 。 还有,

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 需要 |xū yào|need to / 吃药 |chī yào|take medicine / 。 还有 |hái yǒu|also / , 要 |yào|should / 多 |duō|more / 休息 |xiū xi|rest / 。 }

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

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 要 |yào|want / 大杯 |dà bēi|a large / , 不要 |bú yào|no / 冰 |bīng|ice / , 还有 |hái yǒu|and / , 少 |shǎo|easy on the / 放 |fàng / 糖 |táng|sugar / 。 }

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

Remember: 还有 = “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 另外.

5.4 另外 — “in addition, besides”

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

Structure: 。 另外, (Subject) 还 / 也

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 没 |méi|don't have / 时间 |shí jiān|time / 参加 |cān jiā|to join / 。 另外 |lìng wài|besides / , 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě|also / 不太 |bú tài|not really / 感兴趣 |gǎn xìng qù|interested / 。 }

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

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 航班 |háng bān|flight / 经常 |jīng cháng|often / 晚点 |wǎn diǎn|delayed / 。 另外 |lìng wài|in addition / , 飞机餐 |fēi jī cān|the meals / 也 |yě|also / 很 |hěn|very / 难吃 |nán chī|bad / 。 }

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

Remember: 另外 = a **SEPARATE** extra point (另 = “other / separate”) — more formal than 还有, and it likes a 还 / 也 to echo it. It also means “another (separate) one”: 另外一个人.

Watch out

- The added clause usually carries 还 / 也 — 另外, 我也 ..., not a bare 另外, 我 ...

5.5 再说 — “besides, what’s more”

再说 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: , 再说

{zh: 太 |tài|too / 远 |yuǎn|far / 了 |le / , 再说 |zài shuō|besides / 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě|also / 没 |méi|have no / 时间 |shí jiān|time / 。 }

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

{zh: 别 |bié|don’t / 买 |mǎi|buy it / 了 |le / , 再说 |zài shuō|anyway / 你 |nǐ|you / 也 |yě / 不 |bù|don’t / 缺 |quē|need it / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

5.6 可是 / 但是 — “but”

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

Structure: Statement , 可是 / 但是 + Contrary Statement

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

I like him, but he doesn’t like me.

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

This job is tiring, but I really like it.

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

Watch out

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

5.7 而 — joining contrasting ideas

而 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: **不是 A 而是 B** and **是 A 而不是 B**.

Structure: Sentence 1 + 而 + Sentence 2 · 不是 A , 而是 B

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 是 |shì|are / 来 |lái|here to / 办事 |bàn shì|work / 的 |de / , 而 |ér|not / 不是 |bú shì / 来 |lái|to / 玩 |wán|have fun / 的 |de / 。 }

We’re here to work, not to have fun.

{zh: 后悔 |hòu huǐ|regret it / 的 |de / 人 |rén|the one to / 不是 |bú shì|isn’t / 我 |wǒ|me / , 而是 |ér shì|but / 你 |nǐ|you / 自己 |zì jǐ|yourself / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

5.8 用 / 通过 ... 来 + 动词 — “(use X) to do Y”

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

Structure: 用 / 通过 + Method + 来 + Verb Phrase

{zh: 很多 |hěn duō|many / 年轻人 |nián qīng rén|young people / 用 |yòng|use / 手机 |shǒu jī|phone / APP / 来 |lái|to / 点 |diǎn|order / 外卖 |wài mài|takeaway / 。 }

Lots of young people use phone apps to order takeaway.

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 应该 |yīng gāi|should / 想 |xiǎng|find / 办法 |bàn fǎ|a way / 来 |lái|to / 解决 |jiě jué|solve / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 问题 |wèn tí|problem / 。 }

We should find a way to solve this problem.

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

Watch out

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

6 Nouns

6.1 其中 — “among them, of which”

其中 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 , 其中

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 有 |yǒu|have / 四 |sì|four / 辆 |liàng / 汽车 |qì chē|cars / , 其中 |qí zhōng|of which / 三 |sān|three / 辆 |liàng / 是 |shì|are / 宝马 |Bǎo mǎ|BMWs / 。 }

I have four cars, three of which are BMWs.

{zh: 这么 |zhè me|so / 多 |duō|many / 项目 |xiàng mù|projects / , 其中 |qí zhōng|of which / 最 |zuì|the most / 难 |nán|difficult / 的 |de / 是 |shì|is / 环境 |huán jìng|the environmental / 项目 |xiàng mù|one / 。 }

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

Remember: 其中 = “within that (group)” — 其 (“that”) + 中 (“inside”). It always looks *backward* to a set already mentioned; 其中一个 = “one of them.”

Watch out

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

7 Numbers

7.1 分之 — fractions and percentages

Chinese builds a fraction **back to front: denominator + 分之 + 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: 百分之 + number.

Structure: Denominator + 分之 + Numerator

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 文件 |wén jiàn|file / 已经 |yǐ jīng|already / 下载 |xià zǎi|downloaded / 了 |le / 三分之二 |sān fēn zhī èr|two-thirds / 。 }

This file is already two-thirds downloaded.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 的 |de / 手机 |shǒu jī|phone / 只 |zhǐ|only / 有 |yǒu|has / 百分之五 |bǎi fēn zhī wǔ|five percent / 了 |le / 。 }

My phone's down to five percent.

Remember: bottom first, top last — read 分之 as “out of”: 四分之三 = “of four parts (四分), three (之三)” = $\frac{3}{4}$. Percent is just 百分之 (“out of 100”) + the number: 百分之五十 = 50%.

Watch out

- $\frac{3}{4}$ is 四分之三, *never* 三分之四 — getting the order backwards flips the fraction.

8 Particles

8.1 知道 ... 疑问词 ... 吗? — embedding a question inside a 吗 question

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

Structure: Confirmation (知道 ...) + embedded Question + 吗?

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 知道 |zhī dào|know / 他 |tā|he / 是 |shì|is / 谁 |shéi|who / 吗 |ma / ? }

Do you know who he is?

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 说过 |shuō guo|did say / 她 |tā|she / 住 |zhù|lives / 在 |zài / 哪儿 |nǎr|where / 吗 |ma / ? }

Did she say where she lives?

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

Watch out

- The lead verb is one of knowing/saying: 知道, 了解, 明白, 认识, 说过.

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

Echo 吧 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 + 吧, ; Option 2 + 吧,

{zh: 冬天 |dōng tiān|in winter / 去 |qù|go / 吧 |ba / , 太 |tài|too / 冷 |lěng|cold / ; 夏天 |xià tiān|in summer / 去 |qù|go / 吧 |ba / , 太 |tài|too / 热 |rè|hot / 。 }

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

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

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

Remember: doubled 吧 = a no-win fork — “do A 吧, downside; do B 吧, 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 的 — the modal particle 的

A sentence-final 的 can add a tone of **certainty or reassurance** — “(it) definitely (is / will be).” It often rides with 会 or 一定会, sealing a promise or a confident prediction.

Structure: Statement (+ 会 ...) + 的

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 不 |bù|won’t / 会 |huì / 骗 |piàn|lie to / 你 |nǐ|you / 的 |de / 。 }

I would never lie to you.

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

You will succeed.

Remember: this 的 = a spoken full stop of conviction — “trust me, it’s so.” It’s *not* the possessive 的. It loves a 会 / 一定会 ahead of it: 会成功的 (“you *will* make it”).

Watch out

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

9 Prepositions

9.1 随着 — “along with, as”

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

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

{zh: 随着 |suí zhe|as / 经济 |jīng jì|the economy / 的 |de / 发展 |fā zhǎn|develops / , 生活 |shēng huó|life / 越来越 |yuè lái yuè|more and more / 好 |hǎo|comfortable / 。 }

As the economy develops, life keeps getting better.

{zh: 孩子们 |hái zi men|the children / 随着 |suí zhe|along to / 音乐 |yīn yuè|the music / 跳 |tiào|started / 起 |qǐ / 了 |le / 舞 |wǔ|dancing / 。 }

The children started dancing along to the music.

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

Watch out

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

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

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

Structure: 在 + Topic + 上, · 在 + Condition + 下,

{zh: 在 |zài|on / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 问题 |wèn tí|matter / 上 |shàng / , 我们 |wǒ men|our / 的 |de / 看法 |kàn fǎ|views / 一样 |yí yàng|are the same / 。 }

On this matter, our views are the same.

{zh: 在 |zài|under / 这种 |zhè zhǒng|these kinds of / 情况 |qíng kuàng|circumstances / 下 |xià / , 你 |nǐ|you / 会 |huì|would / 怎么 |zěn me|how / 做 |zuò|act / ? }

Under these circumstances, what would you do?

Remember: these are **abstract, not literal**: 在 ... 上 = “in the area of” (在历史上 “in history,” 在语法上 “grammatically”); 在 ... 下 = “under (conditions)” (在帮助下 “with help”). Nothing is physically on top of or beneath anything.

Watch out

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

10 Sentence Patterns

10.1 并 + 不 / 没 — emphatic negation

并 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 不 or 没.

Structure: Subject + 并 + 不 / 没 + Verb / Adjective

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

Starting a business in China actually isn't easy.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 并 |bìng|actually / 没 |méi|didn't / 说过 |shuō guo|say / 这 |zhè|this / 句 |jù / 话 |huà / 。 }

I never actually said that.

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

Watch out

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

11 Sentence patterns

11.1 以 ... 为 ... — “take A as B”

The elegant, semi-classical frame **以 A 为 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: 以 + A + 为 + B

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|our / 公司 |gōng sī|company / 以 |yǐ|takes / 亚洲 |Yà zhōu|the Asian / 市场 |shì chǎng|market / 为 |wéi|as / 主 |zhǔ|its focus / 。 }

Our company focuses mainly on the Asian market.

{zh: 许多 |xǔ duō|many / 企业 |qǐ yè|firms / 发展 |fā zhǎn|grow / 很 |hěn|very / 快 |kuài|fast / , 以 |yǐ|take / 麦当劳 |Mài dāng láo|McDonald’s / 为 |wéi|as / 例 |lì|an example / 。 }

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

Remember: **以 A 为 B = “take A as your B.”** Memorise the set phrases and you’ve got it: 以 ... 为主 (“mainly”), 以 ... 为例 (“for example”), 以 ... 为荣 (“proud of”), 以人为本 (“put people first”). The everyday paraphrase is 把 A 当作 B.

Watch out

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

12 Verbs

12.1 让 / 叫 / 请 / 使 — 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: 让 (everyday “make / let”), 叫 (colloquial “tell”), 请 (polite “ask / invite”), 使 (formal “cause”). At HSK 4 the result can be a verb *or* an adjective.

Structure: Subject + 让 / 叫 / 请 / 使 + Person + Predicate

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 为什么 |wèi shén me|why / 不 |bù|not / 让 |ràng|let / 我 |wǒ|me / 去 |qù|go / ? }

Why won’t you let me go?

{zh: 这部 |zhè bù|this / 电影 |diàn yǐng|film / 让 |ràng|makes / 人 |rén|people / 很 |hěn|very / 感动 |gǎn dòng|moved / 。 }

This film is really moving.

{zh: 他 |tā|his / 的 |de / 演讲 |yǎn jiǎng|speech / 使 |shǐ|made / 听众 |tīng zhòng|the audience / 非常 |fēi cháng|very / 激动 |jī dòng|excited / 。 }

His speech made the audience very excited.

Remember: four causatives, sorted by politeness: **使 (formal) → 让 (neutral) → 叫 (casual) → 请 (polite)**. New at HSK 4: the result can be an **adjective** of feeling — 让人感动 (“makes people moved”), 使人激动 (“excites people”).

Watch out

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

12.2 要看 / 得看 — “it depends on”

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

Structure: 这 / 那 + 要看 / 得看 + Factor

{zh: 这 |zhè|that / 得看 |děi kàn|depends on / 你 |nǐ|your / 的 |de / 时间 |shí jiān|schedule / 。 }

That depends on your schedule.

{zh: 去不去 |qù bu qù|whether I go / 得看 |děi kàn|depends on / 我 |wǒ|my / 的 |de / 心情 |xīn qíng|mood / 。 }

Whether I’ll go depends on my mood.

Remember: 得看 = “(I’ll) have to look at...” = “it depends on...”. The deciding factor almost always holds a question word: 得看天气怎么样, 得看他愿不愿意. Quick fixed reply: 看情况 (“depends on the situation”).

Watch out

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

12.3 好像 — “it seems, as if”

好像 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 似的 (“as if”) at the end.

Structure: (Subject +) 好像 + Predicate

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 好像 |hǎo xiàng|seems / 是 |shì|to be / 英国人 |Yīng guó rén|British / 。 }

He seems to be British.

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

It looks like it’s going to rain.

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

Watch out

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

12.4 在于 — “lies in”

在于 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 + 在于 + Key Point

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

Success lies in perseverance.

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

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

Remember: 在于 = “the key lies IN...” (在 “at” + 于 “in”) — points to where the heart of the matter sits. With a *person* it means “is up to”: 去不去在于你自己 (“whether to go is up to you”).

Watch out

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

12.5 以为 — “(mistakenly) think, assume”

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

Structure: Subject + 以为 + (wrong belief)

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 以为 |yǐ wéi|thought / 他 |tā|he / 是 |shì|was / 德国人 |Dé guó rén|German / 。 }

I thought he was German (he isn’t).

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

Don’t think I don’t know.

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

Watch out

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

12.6 通过 — “through; to pass”

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

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

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 通过 |tōng guò|passed / 了 |le / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 考试 |kǎo shì|exam / 。 }

I passed this exam.

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 通过 |tōng guò|through / 他 |tā|his / 的 |de / 朋友 |péng you|friend / 找到 |zhǎo dào|found / 了 |le / 他 |tā|him / 。 }

We found him through his friend.

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

Watch out

- As a preposition it sets up a means before the main clause: 通过努力, 他成功了.

12.7 来自 — “come from”

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

Structure: Subject + 来自 + Place / Source

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 来自 |láizì|come from / 中国 |Zhōng guó|China / 。 }

I’m from China.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 的 |de / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 想法 |xiǎng fǎ|idea / 来自 |láizì|comes from / 生活 |shēng huó|everyday life / 。 }

This idea of mine comes from everyday life.

Remember: 来自 = “comes from” in one tidy word (来 “come” + 自 “from”). Great for intros (我来自 ...) and abstract origins (灵感来自 ..., “inspiration comes from...”). Casual version: 从 ... 来.

Watch out

- It takes its source *directly*, with no 从: 来自中国 ✓, not 从来自中国.

12.8 来 — the “dummy” verb

A bare 来 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 来 (sometimes 吧), usually with 我 or 你.

Structure: (让 +) Subject + 来 (+ 吧)

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 来 |láizì|do it / 吧 |ba / 。 }

Let me do it.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 写 |xiě|write / 得 |de / 好看 |hǎo kàn|nicely / , 你 |nǐ|you / 来 |láizì|do it / 吧 |ba / 。 }

You write nicely — you do it.

Remember: this 来 does NOT mean “come” — it’s a placeholder for the obvious verb, like English “I’ll *get* this.” 我来 (“I’ll do it”), 你来 (“your turn”), 让他自己来 (“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 不用 — “don’t need to, no need”

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

Structure: Subject + 不用 + Verb Phrase

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

No need to worry.

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

Children don’t need to buy a ticket.

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

Watch out

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

13.2 得 + 动词 — “have to, must”

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

Structure: Subject + 得 + Verb Phrase

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

We have to go now.

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

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

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

Watch out

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

14 Verb phrases

14.1 并 + 动词 — “and (also)”

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

Structure: Verb Phrase 1 + 并 + Verb Phrase 2

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 同意 |tóng yì|agree with / 并 |bìng|and / 支持 |zhī chí|support / 你 |nǐ|your / 的 |de / 决定 |jué dìng|decision / 。 }

I agree with and support your decision.

{zh: 会议 |huì yì|the meeting / 讨论 |tǎo lùn|discussed / 并 |bìng|and / 通过 |tōng guò|approved / 了 |le / 计划 |jì huà|the plan / 。 }

The meeting discussed and approved the plan.

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

Watch out

- Don’t use 并 between nouns — 茶并咖啡 ×.

14.2 少 + 动词 — “do ... less”

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

Structure: 少 + Verb (+ Object)

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 少 |shǎo|less / 放 |fàng|add / 点 |diǎn|a bit of / 盐 |yán|salt / 。 }

Use a bit less salt, please.

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

Quit the babbling!

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

Watch out

- Never 喝少水 — the amount-word leads: 少喝水, 多吃饭.

14.3 多 + 动词 — “do ... more”

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

Structure: 多 + Verb (+ Object)

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

Eat a bit more.

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

Grandpa, you should go out for walks more.

Remember: “eat more” flips to “more-eat” (多吃). 多 and 少 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 少 — both are everyday advice words (多喝水, 少熬夜).

14.4 由 + Person + 动词 — naming who does it

由 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 + 由 + Person + Verb

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 件 |jiàn / 事 |shì|matter / 由 |yóu / 我 |wǒ|me / 负责 |fù zé|is handled by / 。 }

I’m responsible for this matter.

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

This project is to be done by Xiao Li.

Remember: 由 X = “it’s X’s to handle.” It assigns the doer or the responsibility — 这事由我负责 (“I’ll take care of it”), 由你做主 (“it’s your call”). Formal in tone.

Watch out

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

14.5 并且 — “moreover, and also”

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

Structure: VP1 + 并且 + VP2 · VP1 + 并且 + 也 / 还 + VP2

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

This method is simple, and effective too.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 通知 |tōng zhī|told / 了 |le / 所有人 |suǒ yǒu rén|everyone / , 并且 |bìng qiě|moreover / 还 |hái|also / 准备 |zhǔn bèi|prepared / 了 |le / 材料 |cái liào|the materials / 。 }

I told everyone, and moreover prepared the materials.

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

Watch out

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

14.6 从来 + 不 / 没 — “never”

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

Structure: Subject + 从来 + 不 + VP · Subject + 从来 + 没 (有) + Verb + 过

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

She never drinks.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 从来 |cóng lái|never / 没 |méi|has / 见 |jiàn|met / 过 |guo / 她 |tā|her / 妈妈 |mā ma|mother / 。 }

She has never met her mother.

Remember: 从来不 = “never (habit/rule);” 从来没 ... 过 = “never (in experience),” with the experiential 过. Habit → 不; lifetime experience → 没 ... 过. Both can shrink to 从不 / 从没.

Watch out

- Don’t drop the 过 in the experience version: 从来没见过 ✓, not 从来没见过.

14.7 值得 + 动词 — “worth ...ing”

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

Structure: (Subject +) 值得 + Verb

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 想法 |xiǎng fǎ|idea / 值得 |zhí de|worth / 考虑 |kǎo lù|considering / 。 }

This idea is worth considering.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 本 |běn / 书 |shū|book / 很 |hěn|well / 值得 |zhí de|worth / 一看 |yí kàn|a read / 。 }

This book is well worth a read.

Remember: 值得 = worth DOING (an action); 值 = worth MONEY. 值得一看 (“worth a look”), 值得学习 (“worth learning from”) — but 这个值一百块 (“this is worth 100 kuai”).

Watch out

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

14.8 动词 + 到 + Time — “(do) until”

到 after a verb, plus a time or event, works like “until.” It often takes 一直 to stress the unbroken stretch. The structural catch: when the verb has an object, you **repeat the verb**.

Structure: (一直 +) Verb + 到 + Time / Event · Verb + Obj + Verb + 到 + Time

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 在 |zài|at / 酒吧 |jiǔ bā|the bar / 一直 |yì zhí|right / 聊 |liáo|chatted / 到 |dào|until / 半夜 |bàn yè|midnight / 。 }

We chatted at the bar until midnight.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 写 |xiě|did / 作业 |zuò yè|homework / 写 |xiě|until / 到 |dào / 十二点半 |shí èr diǎn bàn|12:30 / 。 }

She did homework until 12:30.

Remember: with an object, repeat the verb: 写作业**写**到十二点 (do-homework, do-until-12). A bare 写作业到 ... is wrong. 一直 ... 到 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 到 + time.

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

害得 (or just 害) 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 害得.

Structure: Reason , 害 (得) + Undesirable Situation

{zh: 下午 |xià wǔ|in the afternoon / 喝 |hē|drank / 了 |le / 两 |liǎng|two / 杯 |bēi / 咖啡 |kā fēi|coffees / , 害得 |hài de|which kept / 我 |wǒ|me / 晚上 |wǎn shang|at night / 睡不着 |shuì bu zháo|from sleeping / 。 }

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

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 害得 |hài de|made / 我们 |wǒ men|us / 都 |dōu|all / 迟到 |chí dào|late / 了 |le / 。 }

You made us all late.

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

Watch out

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

14.10 离合词 — separable (verb-object) words

A surprising number of “verbs” are secretly **verb + object** pairs — 见面 (“meet” = see-face), 睡觉 (“sleep” = sleep-a-sleep), 帮忙 (“help” = do-a-favour), 结婚 (“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: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 见 |jiàn|have met / 过 |guo / 面 |miàn / 。 }

We’ve met before.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 帮 |bāng|did / 了 |le / 我 |wǒ|me / 一个 |yí ge|a / 忙 |máng|favour / 。 }

He did me a favour.

Remember: a separable word is **verb + its own object stuck together** (见 + 面). Inserts (了 / 过 / a number-phrase) go *between* the halves — 睡了一觉, 结过婚 — and you **can’t** bolt a new object on the end: 跟你见面 ✓, never 见面你.

Watch out

- This is *the* classic error: 我想见面你 × → 我想跟你见面 ✓. The “object” slot is already taken by 面.

14.11 动词 + 着 + 动词 + 着 + 就 ... — “while ...ing, suddenly”

Double up **Verb + 着** to set a rolling background action; **就** 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 + 着 + Verb + 着 + 就 + Result + 了

{zh: 走 |zǒu|walking / 着 |zhe / 走 |zǒu|walking / 着 |zhe / , 就 |jiù|then / 到家 |dào jiā|got home / 了 |le / 。 }

Walking along, before we knew it we were home.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 说 |shuō|talking / 着 |zhe / 说 |shuō|talking / 着 |zhe / , 就 |jiù|suddenly / 哭 |kū|cried / 了 |le / 。 }

As she talked, she suddenly started crying.

Remember: V 着 V 着就 ... = “as I kept ...ing, before I knew it ...!” The doubled 着 keeps an action rolling; 就 + 了 springs the surprise that crept up during it (走着走着就到了).

Watch out

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

15 “But” Statements

15.1 尽管 ... 但是 ... — “although, even though”

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

Structure: 尽管 + A , (但是 +) Subject + 还是 + B

{zh: 尽管 |jǐn guǎn|although / 很多 |hěn duō|many / 人 |rén|people / 批评 |pī píng|criticise / 他 |tā|him / , 他 |tā|he / 还是 |hái shì|still / 坚持 |jiān chí|insists on / 这么 |zhè me / 做 |zuò|doing it / 。 }

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

{zh: 尽管 |jǐn guǎn|although / 我 |wǒ|I / 很 |hěn|very / 生气 |shēng qì|angry / , 但是 |dàn shì|but / 没 |méi|didn't / 发脾气 |fā pí qì|lose my temper / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

15.2 倒 — “actually, contrary to expectation”

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

Structure: , Subject + 倒 (+ 也 / 又)

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 不是 |bú shì|isn't / 很 |hěn|very / 努力 |nǔ lì|hard-working / , 成绩 |chéng jì|his grades / 倒 |dào|but actually / 也 |yě / 不错 |bú cuò|aren't bad / 。 }

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

{zh: 英语 |Yīng yǔ|English / 不是 |bú shì|isn't / 他 |tā|his / 的 |de / 母语 |mǔ yǔ|native language / , 他 |tā|he / 说 |shuō|speaks / 得 |de / 倒 |dào|actually / 挺 |tǐng|quite / 地道 |dì dào|native-like / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

15.3 却 — “however, yet”

The adverb 却 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 但是.

Structure: Sentence , (但是 +) Subject + 却

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 是 |shì|is / 老板 |lǎo bǎn|the boss / , 却 |què|yet / 没有 |méi yǒu|no one / 人 |rén / 听 |tīng|listens to / 他 |tā|him / 的 |de / 。 }

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

{zh: 他 |tā|his / 的 |de / 学历 |xué lì|qualifications / 很 |hěn|very / 高 |gāo|high / , 能力 |néng lì|his ability / 却 |què|however / 很 |hěn|very / 一般 |yì bān|average / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

16 ”Even If” Statements

16.1 即使 ... 也 ... — “even if”

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

Structure: 即使 + Condition , (Subject +) 也 + Result

{zh: 即使 |jí shǐ|even if / 你 |nǐ|you / 不 |bù|don't / 想 |xiǎng|want / 让 |ràng|to let / 我 |wǒ|me / 去 |qù|go / , 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě|still / 要 |yào|will / 去 |qù|go / 。 }

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

{zh: 即使 |jí shǐ|even if / 你 |nǐ|you / 很 |hěn|very / 有钱 |yǒu qián|rich / , 也 |yě|still / 买不到 |mǎi bu dào|can't buy / 幸福 |xìng fú|happiness / 。 }

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

{zh: 即使 |jí shǐ|even if / 你 |nǐ|you / 没胃口 |méi wèi kǒu|have no appetite / , 也 |yě|still / 要 |yào|should / 吃 |chī|eat / 一点 |yì diǎn|a little / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

17 “If” Statements

17.1 要是 ... 就 ... — “if ... then ...”

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

Structure: 要是 + Condition , 就 + Result

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 要是 |yào shì|if / 真 |zhēn|really / 想 |xiǎng|miss / 我 |wǒ|me / , 就 |jiù|then / 给 |gěi / 我 |wǒ|me / 打电话 |dǎ diàn huà|call / 。 }

If you really miss me, then call me.

{zh: 要是 |yào shì|if / 明天 |míng tiān|tomorrow / 不 |bù|doesn't / 下雨 |xià yǔ|rain / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 就 |jiù|then / 去 |qù|go / 爬山 |pá shān|hiking / 。 }

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

Remember: 要是 = the chatty 如果 — same “if,” more spoken (and northern). Both fire 就 in the result. Bonus pattern: 要不是 ... = “if it weren't for...” (要不是堵车, 我早就到了, “if not for the traffic, I'd be there already”).

Watch out

- After the subject, 要是 can shrink to 要: 你要不来

18 “No Matter” Statements

18.1 不管 ... 都 / 也 ... — “no matter” (spoken)

不管 ... 都 / 也 ... 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 还是 B / A-not-A) or a **question word** (谁, 什么, 怎么 ...). It's the conversational option.

Structure: 不 管 + (Question Word / choice) , (Subject +) 都 / 也 + Result

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

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

{zh: 不管 |bù guǎn|no matter / 怎么样 |zě me yàng|what happens / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 都 |dōu|all / 要 |yào|must / 好好 |hǎo hǎo|properly / 准备 |zhǔn bèi|prepare / 。 }

No matter what, we must prepare properly.

Remember: 不管 needs something OPEN after it — a question word (谁/什么/怎么) or an “A 还是 B / A-not-A” choice — then 都 / 也 nails the result down regardless. 不管 = *spoken*; 无论 / 不论 = *formal* (next).

Watch out

- Without an open variable it's wrong: 不管你穿什么 ✓, but you can't say 不管这件衣服

18.2 无论 / 不论 ... 都 / 也 ... — “no matter, regardless”

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

Structure: 无 论 / 不 论 + (Question Word / choice) , 都 / 也 + Result

{zh: 无论 |wú lùn|no matter / 多么 |duō me|how / 成功 |chéng gōng|successful / , 他 |tā|he / 都 |dōu|always / 觉得 |jué de|feels / 自己 |zì jǐ|himself / 不够 |bú gòu|not / 好 |hǎo|good enough / 。 }

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

{zh: 无论 |wú lùn|no matter / 天 |tiān|the weather / 多 |duō|how / 热 |rè|hot / , 都 |dōu|always / 要 |yào|must / 坚持 |jiān chí|keep going / 。 }

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

Remember: 无论 / 不论 = the written 不管 — same grammar, same need for an open variable + 都 / 也. Speech → 不管; writing → 无论.

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 由于 — “due to, owing to”

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

Structure: 由于 + Cause , (因此 / 所以)

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

Due to the weather, the flight was cancelled.

{zh: 由于 |yóu yú|due to / 意见 |yì jiàn|opinions / 不一致 |bù yí zhì|differing / , 两 |liǎng|the two / 位 |wèi / 老板 |lǎo bǎn|bosses / 吵 |chǎo|started arguing / 了 |le / 起来 |qǐ lái / 。 }

Due to differing opinions, the two bosses started arguing.

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

Watch out

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

19.2 既然 ... 就 ... — “since, now that”

既然 ... 就 ... 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 那 / 那就). It is **not** a hypothetical.

Structure: 既然 + (given fact) , (那) 就 + Suggestion / Inference

{zh: 既然 |jì rán|since / 你 |nǐ|you / 那么 |nà me|so / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|like it / , 那就 |nà jiù|then just / 买 |mǎi|buy it / 吧 |ba / 。 }

Since you like it so much, just buy it.

{zh: 既然 |jì rán|since / 大家 |dà jiā|everyone / 都 |dōu / 不 |bù|isn’t / 感兴趣 |gǎn xìng qù|interested / , 就 |jiù|then / 换 |huàn|change / 个 |ge / 话题 |huà tí|the topic / 吧 |ba / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

19.3 因此 — “therefore, as a result”

因此 (“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 由于 / 因为 cause.

Structure: Cause , 因此 + Effect

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

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

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 在 |zài|in / 农村 |nóng cūn|the countryside / 长大 |zhǎng dà|grew up / , 因此 |yīn cǐ|therefore / 很 |hěn|well / 了解 |liǎo jiě|understands / 农民 |nóng mín|farmers’ / 的 |de / 生活 |shēng huó|life / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

20 Complements

20.1 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.

20.2 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 ×.

20.3 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”).

20.4 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).

21 Conditional Statements

21.1 只要 ... 就 ... — “as long as”

只要 ... 就 ... 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: 只要 + Condition , 就 + Result

{zh: 只要 |zhǐ yào|as long as / 你 |nǐ|you / 努力 |nǔ lì|hard / 学习 |xué xí|study / , 就 |jiù|then / 会 |huì|will / 有 |yǒu|make / 进步 |jìn bù|progress / 。 }

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

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

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

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

Watch out

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

21.2 除非 ... 才 ... / 否则 ... — “unless”

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

Structure: Result , 除非 + Condition · 除非 + Condition , 才 + Result

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 不 |bù|won’t / 去 |qù|go / , 除非 |chú fēi|unless / 你 |nǐ|you / 也 |yě|too / 去 |qù|go / 。 }

I won’t go unless you go too.

{zh: 除非 |chú fēi|only if / 老板 |lǎo bǎn|the boss / 给 |gěi|gives / 我 |wǒ|me / 加薪 |jiā xīn|a raise / , 我 |wǒ|I / 才 |cái|then / 会 |huì|will / 留下来 |liú xià lái|stay / 。 }

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

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

Watch out

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

22 Noun Phrases

22.1 所有 (的) + 名词 — “all (the)”

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

Structure: 所有 + (的) + Noun + 都 ...

{zh: 所有 |suǒ yǒu|all / 人 |rén|the people / 都 |dōu / 走 |zǒu|left / 了 |le / 吗 |ma / ? }

Has everyone left?

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|our / 学校 |xué xiào|school / 所有 |suǒ yǒu|all / 的 |de / 老师 |lǎo shī|teachers / 都 |dōu / 会 |huì|can / 说 |shuō|speak / 英文 |Yīng wén|English / 。 }

All the teachers at our school can speak English.

Remember: 所有 ... 都 = “every single one” (stronger than a bare 都). To say “not all,” negate the whole with **不是**: 不是所有人都 ... (“not everyone...”), never 所有人都不 ... (which means “none of them...”).

Watch out

- 所有人都不去 (“none go”) vs 不是所有人都去 (“not all go”) — where the 不 / 不是 sits flips the meaning.

22.2 之一 — “one of (the) ...”

之一 at the **end** of a noun phrase means “one of the ...” — a single member of a named group. It very often follows a **最** (“most”) phrase. The **之** is archaic (“of”), but the phrase is everyday, even in speech.

Structure: Subject + 是 + [Noun Phrase] + 之一

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 是 |shì|is / 我 |wǒ|my / 最好 |zuì hǎo|best / 的 |de / 朋友 |péng you|friends / 之一 |zhī yī|one of / 。 }

She is one of my best friends.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 是 |shì|is / 世界上 |shì jiè shàng|in the world / 最 |zuì|biggest / 大 |dà / 的 |de / 城市 |chéng shì|cities / 之一 |zhī yī|one of / 。 }

This is one of the biggest cities in the world.

Remember: 之一 = “one OF (them),” bolted onto the **END** (最好的朋友之一). 之 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: ... 城市之一 ✓, not 之一 ... 城市.

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

另外 (or **另**) singles out the **remaining or a different** member — “(the) other, another.” There’s no 的 after it, and it’s often followed by 一个. Use bare **另** for a singular (另一个).

Structure: 另外 + Number + Measure Word + Noun · 另 + 一 + MW + Noun

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 有 |yǒu|have / 两 |liǎng|two / 个 |ge / 手机 |shǒu jī|phones / , 一个 |yí ge|one / 是 |shì|is / 小米 |Xiǎo mǐ|Xiaomi / , 另 |lìng|the other / 一个 |yí ge / 是 |shì|is / iPhone / 。 }

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

{zh: 一套 |yí tào|one / 自己 |zì jǐ|herself / 住 |zhù|lives in / , 另 |lìng|the other / 一套 |yí tào / 租 |zū|rents / 出去 |chū qù|out / 了 |le / 。 }

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

Remember: 另外 / 另 = “the OTHER one” — and **NO** 的 (另外一个 ✓, not 另外的一个). For a singular, just 另: 另一个, 另一种. Pairs beautifully with 一个 ... 另一个 ... (“one... the other...”).

Watch out

- Don’t add 的: 另外一个人 ✓, 另外的人 means something looser (“other people”).

23 Sentence Patterns

23.1 连 + 动词 + 都 + 不 / 没 + 动词 — “didn’t even”

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

Structure: 连 + Verb + 都 + 不 / 没 + (same) Verb (, 就)

{zh: 这个人 |zhè ge rén|this person / 我 |wǒ|I / 连 |lián|even / 见 |jiàn|met / 都 |dōu / 没 |méi|haven’t / 见过 |jiàn guo|met / 。 }

I’ve never even met this person.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 连 |lián|even / 说 |shuō|say / 都 |dōu / 不 |bù|didn’t / 说 |shuō|say / 就 |jiù|just / 走 |zǒu|left / 了 |le / 。 }

He left without even saying a word.

Remember: 连 ... 都 + the verb REPEATED maxes the emphasis — 见都没见过 (“never even met”). Tack on 就 for “without even ...ing, then...”: 连问都不问就走了 (“left without even asking”).

Watch out

- The repeat is what does the work — 连见都没见过, not 连都没见过.

23.2 为 ... 而 ... — “for the sake of”

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

Structure: Subject + 为 + Goal + 而 + Action

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 为 |wèi|for / 梦想 |mèng xiǎng|our dreams / 而 |ér / 努力 |nǔ lì|strive / 。 }

We strive for our dreams.

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

Don’t live for other people.

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

Watch out

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

23.3 任何 + 名词 + 都 / 也 — “any (at all)”

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

Structure: 任何 + Noun + 都 / 也 + Predicate

{zh: 任何 |rèn hé|any / 人 |rén|person / 都 |dōu|at all / 不 |bù|can’t / 能 |néng / 说服 |shuō fú|persuade / 他 |tā|him / 。 }

No one at all can persuade him.

{zh: 这里 |zhè lǐ|here / 任何 |rèn hé|any / 车 |chē|vehicle / 都 |dōu|at all / 不 |bù|can’t / 可以 |kě yǐ / 通过 |tōng guò|pass / 。 }

No vehicle at all may pass here.

Remember: 任何 = emphatic “any whatsoever” + 都 / 也 — and NO 的 (任何人 ✓, not 任何的人). It’s the stronger, more formal sibling of 什么 (任何人 hits harder than 谁/什么人).

Watch out

- It always wants a 都 / 也 to complete the sweep — 任何人都 ..., not a bare 任何人

23.4 既 ... 又 / 也 ... — “both ... and ...”

既 A 又 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 又 ... 又

Structure: 既 + A + 又 / 也 + B

{zh: 这家 |zhè jiā|this / 餐厅 |cān tīng|restaurant / 既 |jì|both / 便宜 |pián yi|cheap / 又 |yòu|and / 好吃 |hǎo chī|tasty / 。 }

This restaurant is both cheap and tasty.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 做 |zuò|does / 事情 |shì qing|things / 既 |jì|both / 快 |kuài|fast / 又 |yòu|and / 好 |hǎo|well / 。 }

He does things both quickly and well.

Remember: 既 A 又 B = “both A and B,” and A and B should MATCH (same length/type) — 既便宜又好吃, 既快又好. It’s the dressed-up 又 ... 又 ...; 既 opens, 又 / 也 follows.

Watch out

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

23.5 在 ... 上 / 下 / 里 / 旁边 — locations

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

Structure: 在 + Location + 上 / 下 / 里 / 旁边

{zh: 你 |nǐ|your / 的 |de / 手机 |shǒu jī|phone / 在 |zài|is in / 包 |bāo|the bag / 里 |lǐ / 吗 |ma / ? }

Is your phone in the bag?

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

The supermarket is next to my house.

Remember: the position word comes AFTER the place — 在桌子上, 在包里, 在床下 — the mirror of English “on/in the ...”. And **big places take no position word**: 在中国 ✓ (never 在中国里).

Watch out

- A bare 在桌子 is incomplete — you need the 上 / 里 / 下 to anchor it.

24 Basic/Simple Sentence Patterns

24.1 连 ... 都 ... — “even”

连 ... 都 (也) 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: 连 + Subject / Object + 都 (+ 不 / 没) + Verb

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 问题 |wèn tí|question / 太 |tài|so / 简单 |jiǎn dān|simple / 了 |le / , 连 |lián|even / 三岁 |sān suì|a three-year-old / 小孩 |xiǎo hái|child / 都 |dōu|even / 知道 |zhī dào|knows / 。 }

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

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 什么 |shén me|anything / 都 |dōu / 吃 |chī|eats / , 连 |lián|even / 狗肉 |gǒu ròu|dog meat / 都 |dōu|even / 吃 |chī|eats / 。 }

He eats anything — even dog meat.

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

Watch out

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

24.2 疑问词 + 都 — “every / any”

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

Structure: Question Word + 都 + Predicate

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

Everyone loves good food.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 哪儿 |nǎr|anywhere / 都 |dōu / 不 |bù|don't / 想 |xiǎng|want / 去 |qù|to go / 。 }

I don't want to go anywhere.

Remember: question word + 都 = “all / every”; + 不 / 没 = “none / nothing.” 谁都 (everyone), 什么都 (everything), 哪儿都 (everywhere), 怎么都 (no matter how) — then a 不 / 没 turns each into its negative (什么都不知道).

Watch out

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

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

倍 counts multiples — “A 是 B 的 N 倍” = “A is N times B.” Watch the maths: **N 倍 is the total**, $\times N$ — 三倍 is “three times (as much),” *not* “three times *more*.”

Structure: A + 是 + B + 的 + Number + 倍

{zh: 他 |tā|his / 现在 |xiàn zài|now / 的 |de / 工资 |gōng zī|salary / 是 |shì|is / 两年前 |liǎng nián qián|two years ago / 的 |de / 三倍 |sān bèi|three times / 。 }

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

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 城市 |chéng shì|city's / 的 |de / 人口 |rén kǒu|population / 是 |shì|is / 那个 |nà ge|that one's / 的 |de / 两倍 |liǎng bèi|twice / 。 }

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

Remember: **N 倍 = the TOTAL ($\times N$), not “N times more.”** 三倍 = $3\times$, 两倍 = $2\times$ (twice). The 是 ... 的 frame brackets the two things compared.

Watch out

- 增加了三倍 (“increased threefold”) is read ambiguously in real life — be careful with it in maths contexts.

24.4 一点 + 也 / 都 + 不 ... — “not ... at all”

一点 + 也 / 都 + 不 / 没 is the emphatic, absolute negative — “not (even) ... at all, not one bit.”

Structure: Subject + 一点 + 也 / 都 + 不 / 没 + Adjective / Verb

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 一点 |yì diǎn|at all / 也 |yě / 不 |bù|not / 胖 |pàng|fat / 。 }

You're not fat at all.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 一点 |yì diǎn|at all / 都 |dōu / 没 |méi|didn't / 听懂 |tīng dǒng|understand / 。 }

I didn't understand a single bit.

Remember: it's the 也 / 都 sitting between 一点 and 不 / 没 that makes it absolute — “not even the smallest bit.” A bare 一点不 / 一点没 (no 也/都) is noticeably weaker.

Watch out

- Keep all the pieces: 一点 + 也/都 + 不/没 — drop the 也/都 and the “at all” force fades.

24.5 不知道 ... 好 — “not sure what's best”

End a clause with **好** after 不知道 and you get “(I) don't know what would be best” — that stuck, can't-decide feeling. It's often 才好.

Structure: Subject + 不知道 + Question Phrase + (才) 好

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 真的 |zhēn de|really / 不知道 |bù zhī dào|don't know / 怎么办 |zěn me bàn|what to do / 才 |cái / 好 |hǎo|best / 。 }

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

{zh: 不知道 |bù zhī dào|not sure / 送 |sòng|to give / 什么 |shén me|what / 礼物 |lǐ wù|gift / 好 |hǎo|best / 。 }

Not sure what gift would be best.

Remember: the trailing **好** = “...would be best” — 不知道怎么办才好 (“don't know what on earth to do for the best”). The 才 sharpens the dilemma.

Watch out

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

24.6 对 ... 来说 / 一般来说 — “for ..., generally speaking”

对 + person + 来说 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 + 来说, · 一般来说,

{zh: 对 |duì|for / 我 |wǒ|me / 来说 |lái shuō|as far as concerned / , 健康 |jiàn kāng|health / 最 |zuì|the most / 重要 |zhòng yào|important / 。 }

For me, health matters most.

{zh: 一般来说 |yì bān lái shuō|generally speaking / , 私立学校 |sī lì xué xiào|private schools / 都 |dōu / 比较 |bǐ jiào|fairly / 贵 |guì|expensive / 。 }

Generally speaking, private schools are fairly pricey.

Remember: **对 X 来说** = “from X's angle”; **一般来说** = “as a rule.” Both are sentence-openers that set the frame. A cousin: 拿 ... 来说 = “take ... as an example.”

Watch out

- It's 对 ... 来说, not 对 ... 说 — the 来 is part of the fixed frame.

25 Complex Sentence Patterns

25.1 形容词 + 是 + 形容词, 但是 ... — conceding a point

The frame **Adj 是 Adj, 但是 ...** 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 + 是 + (same) Adjective , 但是 / 就是

{zh: 工作 |gōng zuò|work / 忙 |máng|busy / 是 |shì / 忙 |máng|busy / , 但是 |dàn shì|but / 我 |wǒ|I’m / 很 |hěn|very / 开心 |kāi xīn|happy / 。 }

Work may be busy, but I’m very happy.

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

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

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

Watch out

- The adjective must repeat exactly around 是: 好看是好看, not 好看是漂亮.

25.2 一 ... 就 ... — “as soon as”

一 **A 就 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 + 一 + Event 1 , 就 + Event 2

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 一 |yī|as soon as / 下课 |xià kè|class ends / 就 |jiù|then / 去 |qù|go / 吃 |chī|eat / 午饭 |wǔ fàn|lunch / 。 }

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

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 一 |yī|the moment / 喝酒 |hē jiǔ|drinks / 就 |jiù|then / 脸红 |liǎn hóng|goes red / 。 }

He goes red the moment he drinks.

Remember: 一 **A 就 B** = “**the moment A, B**” — instant, automatic follow-on (一下课就 ...). The two clauses can even have different subjects: 老师一来, 大家就安静了 (“the moment the teacher came, everyone went quiet”).

Watch out

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

25.3 一方面 ... 一方面 ... — “on one hand ... on the other ...”

一方面 ... (另) 一方面 ... 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 又 / 也 / 还.

Structure: 一方面 + A , (另) 一方面 + B

{zh: 自己 |zì jǐ / 做饭 |zuò fàn|cooking for yourself / 一方面 |yì fāng miàn|on one hand / 健康 |jiàn kāng|healthy / , 一方面 |yì fāng miàn|on the other / 还 |hái|also / 能 |néng|can / 省钱 |shěng qián|save money / 。 }

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

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 一方面 |yì fāng miàn|on one hand / 想 |xiǎng|wants to / 改变 |gǎi biàn|change / , 一方面 |yì fāng miàn|on the other / 又 |yòu|yet / 害怕 |hài pà|fears / 改变 |gǎi biàn|change / 。 }

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

Remember: 一方面 ... 一方面 ... **weighs two sides** — 方面 = “side / aspect.” The sides can agree (two perks) or clash (want vs fear); a clashing second side often carries 又 (“yet”).

Watch out

- The second one can take 另 (另一方面) for extra clarity — both forms are fine.

26 Not only... but also...

26.1 不但 / 不仅 / 不只 ... 而且 / 还 / 也 ... — “not only ... but also ...”

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

Structure: Subject + 不但 / 不仅 / 不只 + A , 而且 / 还 / 也 + B

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

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

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 不仅 |bù jǐn|not only / 完成 |wán chéng|finished / 了 |le / 任务 |rèn wù|the task / , 而且 |ér qiě|but also / 提前 |tí qián|ahead of schedule / 了 |le / 十天 |shí tiān|by ten days / 。 }

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

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

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 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 bu 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.

27.2 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.

27.3 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.

28 Comparing similar prepositions

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

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

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

On this question, what are everyone’s thoughts?

{zh: 对于 |duì yú|with / 我们 |wǒ men|our / 的 |de / 工作 |gōng zuò|work / , 老板 |lǎo bǎn|the boss / 很 |hěn|very / 满意 |mǎn yì|satisfied / 。 }

The boss is very satisfied with our work.

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

Watch out

- Where only a topic is meant, the two overlap (关于/对于这个问题 ...) — the split bites when an attitude is involved.

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

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

{zh: 从 |cóng|from / 明天 |míng tiān|tomorrow / 开始 |kāi shǐ|on / , 我 |wǒ|I / 不 |bù|won’t / 抽烟 |chōu yān|smoke / 了 |le / 。 }

Starting from tomorrow, I’m quitting smoking.

{zh: 我家 |wǒ jiā|my home / 离 |lí|from / 公司 |gōng sī|the office / 很 |hěn|very / 近 |jìn|close / 。 }

My home is very close to the office.

Remember: **离** = the **GAP** (“how far apart,” pairs with **远** / **近**); **从** = the **START** (“where it begins”). 我家离公司很近 (“close to”) vs 从明天开始 (“starting tomorrow”). Distance → 离; origin point → 从.

Watch out

- 离 needs two endpoints and a distance word (离 ... 远/近); 从 needs a route or a start time (从 ... 走, 从 ... 开始).

29 Comparing similar separate functions

29.1 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.

29.2 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.

29.3 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.

30 Comparing similar time words

30.1 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.