

Particles

Ref Hsk5 Grammar

动词 + 宾语 + 了 — advanced 了 placement

The completion 了 can sit right after the **verb** or after the **object** — and which you pick depends on the object's length. With a short object, either works; with a **long** object, put 了 right after the verb so the listener isn't left hanging. 了 can also chain “after doing A, then B” in a future sequence.

Structure: Subject + Verb + 了 + Object · Subject + Verb + Object + 了

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 今天 |jīn tiān|today / 见 |jiàn|saw / 了 |le / 一个 |yí ge|an / 老朋友 |lǎo péng you|old friend / 。 }

I saw an old friend today.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 到 |dào|get / 了 |le / 家 |jiā|home / 给 |gěi / 我 |wǒ|me / 打电话 |dǎ diàn huà|call / 。 }

Call me once you've got home.

Remember: short object → 了 either side; LONG object → 了 right after the verb (见了一个很久没见的老朋友 — don't make the listener wait for the 了). And V 了 O 就 ... chains two future actions: 下了课就去找你 (“come find you after class”).

Watch out

- With a long, modified object, 了 after the object reads awkwardly — keep it on the verb.

动词 + 了 + 补语 — advanced 了 with complements

When a complement follows the verb, 了 usually goes **after the complement** (吃完了, 买到了). Wedging it **between** the verb and complement (站了起来) is more written, and limited mostly to direction complements.

Structure: Subject + Verb + Complement + 了 · (rarer) Subject + Verb + 了 + Complement

{zh: 票 |piào|the tickets / 卖 |mài|sold / 光 |guāng|out / 了 |le / 。 }

The tickets are sold out.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 站 |zhàn|stood / 了 |le / 起来 |qǐ lái|up / 。 }

He stood up.

Remember: default: 了 AFTER the complement (吃完了, 卖光了). 了 *between* verb and complement is the exception — mostly direction complements (站了起来, 跑了过来), and more written.

Watch out

- 吃完了 is wrong — the 了 sits after the whole verb-complement: 吃完了.

话题 + 嘛 — topic-marking 嘛

The particle 嘛 after a **topic** lets you name it, then comment — “as for ..., well, ...” The comment is often something you treat as **self-evident** — a gentle “well, obviously...”.

Structure: Topic + 嘛, Comment

{zh: 第一次 |dì yī cì|the first time / 嘛 |ma / , 以后 |yǐ hòu|later / 就 |jiù / 会 |huì|get the hang of it / 了 |le / 。 }

It's your first time — you'll soon get the hang of it.

{zh: 名牌 |míng pái|a brand name / 嘛 |ma / , 一定 |yí dìng|surely / 不 |bù|not / 便宜 |pián yi|cheap / 。 }

Well, it's a brand name — it's bound to be pricey.

Remember: 嘛 = “well, obviously...” — it flags a topic and frames the comment as common sense (名牌嘛 — “it's a brand name, *what do you expect*”). A “isn't it clear?” softener.

Watch out

- The 嘛 reading is “obvious / reasonable” — don't confuse it with the question 吗.

..... 呢? — softening a question

呢 makes a question gentler and more **musings or reflective** — almost “(I wonder) ...?” It works after 还是 (weighing options), after a question word, or on a V-不-V question.

Structure: Question + 呢?

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 去 |qù|went / 哪儿 |nǎr|where / 了 |le / 呢 |ne / ? }

Where's he gone, I wonder?

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 是 |shì|is / 谁 |shéi|whose / 的 |de / 笔 |bǐ|pen / 呢 |ne / ? }

Whose pen is this, I wonder?

Remember: this 呢 = a soft, musing “(I wonder)…” — it takes the edge off a question word / 还是 / V-不-V query, often almost self-directed. Softer than a blunt 哪儿去了? .

Watch out

- It doesn't form yes/no questions (that's 吗) — it rides on an existing question.