

Sentence Patterns

HSK 5 Grammar

Use the examples with their context and limits. Recall a sentence before reading the model. Original teaching additions accompany examples adapted from Chinese Grammar Wiki (AllSet Learning, CC BY-NC-SA); see the course reference provenance.

Advanced 把 (把 + Obj + Verb + result)

■ Show what happens to a known object

- You ask a friend to finish a particular book.
- 请把这本书看完。** – 把 brings the known book before the action and its result.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is **Advanced 把 (把 + Obj + Verb + result)**. Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

我把书看完了。

wǒ bǎ shū kàn wán le

Word guide: 我 – I; 书 – book; 看完 – finish reading.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, **请把这本书看完。**: 把 brings the known book before the action and its result.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 把 sentences also occur as requests, plans and negations.
- They do not always report an action already completed.

■ Use the distinction

- 把 brings the known book before the action and its result.
- 把 sentences also occur as requests, plans and negations. They do not always report an action already completed.

■ Try it with help closed

You ask a friend to finish a particular book. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 请把这本书看完。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 把 sentences also occur as requests, plans and negations.
- They do not always report an action already completed.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

N1 + 不比 + N2 + Adj (no more ... than)

■ No greater than does not mean equal

- One person denies being taller than another.
- 我不比他高。** – The speaker is no taller, allowing equal height or shorter height.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is **N1 + 不比 + N2 + Adj (no more ... than)**. Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

我不比他高。

wǒ bù bǐ tā gāo

Word guide: 我 – I; 不比 – no more than; 他 – him; 高 – tall.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, **我不比他高。**: The speaker is no taller, allowing equal height or shorter height.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 没有他高 normally states being shorter in this comparison.
- 不比 does not by itself decide between equality and a lower value.

■ Use the distinction

- The speaker is no taller, allowing equal height or shorter height.
- 没有他高 normally states being shorter in this comparison. 不比 does not by itself decide between equality and a lower value.

■ Try it with help closed

One person denies being taller than another. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 我不比他高。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 没有他高 normally states being shorter in this comparison.
- 不比 does not by itself decide between equality and a lower value.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

要 + Verb + 就 + Verb (if you’re going to, do it right)

■ The repeated frame takes its force from the rest

- A coach asks someone to practise seriously if they practise at all.
- 要学就认真学。 – The condition leads to an insistence on serious effort here.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 要 + Verb + 就 + Verb (if you’re going to, do it right). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

要做就做好。

yào zuò jiù zuò hǎo

Word guide: 要 – if going to; 做 – do; 就 – then; 做好 – do well.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 要学就认真学。: The condition leads to an insistence on serious effort here.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 要走就走 can instead grant permission or express impatience.
- Repetition alone does not always mean doing something well.

■ Use the distinction

- The condition leads to an insistence on serious effort here.
- 要走就走 can instead grant permission or express impatience. Repetition alone does not always mean doing something well.

■ Try it with help closed

A coach asks someone to practise seriously if they practise at all. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 要学就认真学。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 要走就走 can instead grant permission or express impatience.
- Repetition alone does not always mean doing something well.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

少不了 (can’t do without)

■ An essential person differs from an expected problem

- A team needs one particular member’s expertise.
- 这件事少不了你。 – The speaker presents that person as indispensable to the task.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 少不了 (can’t do without). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

这件事少不了你。

zhè jiàn shì shǎo bù liǎo nǐ

Word guide: 这 – this; 件 – (measure word); 事 – matter; 少不了 – can’t do without; 你 – you.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 这件事少不了你。: The speaker presents that person as indispensable to the task.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 旅行少不了麻烦 instead presents trouble as expected.
- Context distinguishes necessity from an anticipated accompaniment.

■ Use the distinction

- The speaker presents that person as indispensable to the task.
- 旅行少不了麻烦 instead presents trouble as expected. Context distinguishes necessity from an anticipated accompaniment.

■ Try it with help closed

A team needs one particular member’s expertise. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 这件事少不了你。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 旅行少不了麻烦 instead presents trouble as expected.
- Context distinguishes necessity from an anticipated accompaniment.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

A 等于 B (equals / amounts to)

■ Distinguish literal equality from a rhetorical equation

- A speaker warns that not practising prevents improvement.
- 不练习等于放弃进步的机会。 – 等于 rhetorically treats not practising as giving up an opportunity.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is A 等于 B (equals / amounts to). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

二加二等于四。

èr jiā èr děng yú sì

Word guide: 二 – two; 加 – plus; 二 – two; 等于 – equals; 四 – four.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 不练习等于放弃进步的机会。: 等于 rhetorically treats not practising as giving up an opportunity.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- Mathematical equality is exact; a figurative equation is an evaluation that can be disputed.
- Do not turn a speaker’s comparison into a universal factual rule.

■ Use the distinction

- 等于 rhetorically treats not practising as giving up an opportunity.
- Mathematical equality is exact; a figurative equation is an evaluation that can be disputed. Do not turn a speaker’s comparison into a universal factual rule.

■ Try it with help closed

A speaker warns that not practising prevents improvement. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 不练习等于放弃进步的机会。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Mathematical equality is exact; a figurative equation is an evaluation that can be disputed.
- Do not turn a speaker’s comparison into a universal factual rule.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

从 ... 中 (from within)

■ Draw a lesson from an abstract source

- A team identifies lessons from a failed attempt.
- 我们从失败中学习。 – The failed experience is the source of learning.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 从 ... 中 (from within). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

我们从失败中学习。

wǒ men cóng shī bài zhōng xué xí

Word guide: 我们 – we; 从 – from; 失败 – failure; 中 – within; 学习 – learn.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 我们从失败中学习。: The failed experience is the source of learning.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 中 can refer to an abstract experience as well as a physical set or container.
- The sentence does not claim that learning automatically occurs without reflection.

■ Use the distinction

- The failed experience is the source of learning.
- 中 can refer to an abstract experience as well as a physical set or container. The sentence does not claim that learning automatically occurs without reflection.

■ Try it with help closed

A team identifies lessons from a failed attempt. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 我们从失败中学习。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 中 can refer to an abstract experience as well as a physical set or container.
- The sentence does not claim that learning automatically occurs without reflection.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

无 ... 可 ... (have no ... to ...)

■ Interpret lack of an available option

- A speaker has nothing further to say.
- 我无话可说。 – The speaker presents no available words to say.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 无 ... 可 ... (have no ... to ...). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

我无话可说。

wǒ wú huà kě shuō

Word guide: 我 – I; 无话 – no words; 可 – to; 说 – say.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 我无话可说。: The speaker presents no available words to say.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 可 expresses possibility in this compact frame.
- 无路可走 may be figurative; do not assume every 无 ... 可 ... phrase describes a literal location.

■ Use the distinction

- The speaker presents no available words to say.
- 可 expresses possibility in this compact frame. 无路可走 may be figurative; do not assume every 无 ... 可 ... phrase describes a literal location.

■ Try it with help closed

A speaker has nothing further to say. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 我无话可说。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 可 expresses possibility in this compact frame.
- 无路可走 may be figurative; do not assume every 无 ... 可 ... phrase describes a literal location.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

不但 ..., 甚至连 ... 也 ... (not only ..., even ...)

■ Add the case that is striking in this context

- A learner can use standard Chinese and also a local dialect.
- **他不但会中文，甚至连方言也会。** – The dialect is presented as an especially striking additional ability.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is **不但 ..., 甚至连 ... 也 ... (not only ..., even ...)**. Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

他不但会中文，甚至连方言也会。

tā bú dàn huì Zhōng wén shèn zhì lián fāng yán yě huì

Word guide: 他 – he; 不但 – not only; 会 – can; 中文 – Chinese; 甚至 – even; 连 – even; 方言 – dialects; 也 – also; 会 – can.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, **他不但会中文，甚至连方言也会。**: The dialect is presented as an especially striking additional ability.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- What counts as striking depends on the speaker’s expectation.
- The sentence does not establish that every dialect is harder than every standard-language task.

■ Use the distinction

- The dialect is presented as an especially striking additional ability.
- What counts as striking depends on the speaker’s expectation. The sentence does not establish that every dialect is harder than every standard-language task.

■ Try it with help closed

A learner can use standard Chinese and also a local dialect. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 他不但会中文，甚至连方言也会。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- What counts as striking depends on the speaker’s expectation.
- The sentence does not establish that every dialect is harder than every standard-language task.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

跟 / 和 ... 有关的 + Noun (related to)

■ Build a modifier without claiming a cause

- You identify an issue connected with health.
- **跟健康有关的问题。** – The phrase modifies 问题 as health-related.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is **跟 / 和 ... 有关的 + Noun (related to)**. Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

这是跟健康有关的问题。

zhè shì gēn jiàn kāng yǒu guān de wèn tí

Word guide: 这 – this; 是 – is; 跟 – with; 健康 – health; 有关 – related; 问题 – issue.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, **跟健康有关的问题。**: The phrase modifies 问题 as health-related.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 有关 states a relationship, not proof that health caused the issue.
- 跟 and 和 can both introduce the related topic here.

■ Use the distinction

- The phrase modifies 问题 as health-related.
- 有关 states a relationship, not proof that health caused the issue. 跟 and 和 can both introduce the related topic here.

■ Try it with help closed

You identify an issue connected with health. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 跟健康有关的问题。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 有关 states a relationship, not proof that health caused the issue.
- 跟 and 和 can both introduce the related topic here.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

所谓 (the so-called ...)

■ A named term can be explained neutrally

- A teacher defines what sustainable development means.
- 所谓可持续发展, 是指兼顾现在和未来的发展。 – 所谓 introduces the term being defined.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 所谓 (the so-called ...). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

所谓的成功, 不只是钱。

suǒ wèi de chéng gōng bù zhǐ shì qián

Word guide: 所谓 – so-called; 成功 – success; 不 – not; 只是 – only; 钱 – money.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 所谓可持续发展, 是指兼顾现在和未来的发展。: 所谓 introduces the term being defined.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- 所谓 can also signal scepticism in a context such as 所谓的专家.
- The word alone does not force a dismissive attitude.

■ Use the distinction

- 所谓 introduces the term being defined.
- 所谓 can also signal scepticism in a context such as 所谓的专家. The word alone does not force a dismissive attitude.

■ Try it with help closed

A teacher defines what sustainable development means. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 所谓可持续发展, 是指兼顾现在和未来的发展。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 所谓 can also signal scepticism in a context such as 所谓的专家.
- The word alone does not force a dismissive attitude.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

在 + Time + 内 (within a span)

■ A deadline differs from taking the full duration

- An instruction allows up to three days for completion.
- 请在三天内完成。 – Completion is required within the stated time window.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 在 + Time + 内 (within a span). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

请在三天内完成。

qǐng zài sān tiān nèi wán chéng

Word guide: 请 – please; 在 – within; 三天 – three days; 内 – within; 完成 – finish.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 请在三天内完成。: Completion is required within the stated time window.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- Finishing sooner still meets this wording.
- Work out the starting point from the instruction; 内 does not specify that the task lasts exactly three days.

■ Use the distinction

- Completion is required within the stated time window.
- Finishing sooner still meets this wording. Work out the starting point from the instruction; 内 does not specify that the task lasts exactly three days.

■ Try it with help closed

An instruction allows up to three days for completion. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 请在三天内完成。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Finishing sooner still meets this wording.
- Work out the starting point from the instruction; 内 does not specify that the task lasts exactly three days.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

宁可 ... , 也 ... (would rather)

■ A preference accepts a cost

- A person prefers walking to taking a bus.
- 我宁可走路，也不坐车。 – Walking is the stated preference over the bus option.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 宁可 ... , 也 ... (would rather). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

我宁可走路，也不坐车。

wǒ nìng kě zǒu lù yě bù zuò chē

Word guide: 我 – I; 宁可 – would rather; 走路 – walk; 也 – than; 不 – not; 坐车 – take a bus.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 我宁可走路，也不坐车。: Walking is the stated preference over the bus option.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- The sentence expresses a choice or willingness.
- It does not report that the walk already occurred or that the preference applies without limits in every situation.

■ Use the distinction

- Walking is the stated preference over the bus option.
- The sentence expresses a choice or willingness. It does not report that the walk already occurred or that the preference applies without limits in every situation.

■ Try it with help closed

A person prefers walking to taking a bus. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 我宁可走路，也不坐车。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- The sentence expresses a choice or willingness.
- It does not report that the walk already occurred or that the preference applies without limits in every situation.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Verb + 就 + Verb (indifference / a shrug)

■ Accept a challenge in the repeated frame

- A friend challenges you to go; you agree defiantly.
- 去就去，怕什么。 – The speaker accepts going and dismisses the challenge.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is Verb + 就 + Verb (indifference / a shrug). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

去就去，怕什么。

qù jiù qù pà shén me

Word guide: 去 – go; 就 – then; 去 – go; 怕 – fear; 什么 – what.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 去就去，怕什么。: The speaker accepts going and dismisses the challenge.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- Tone may show defiance, resignation or indifference.
- The repeated verb does not mean the speaker has no feelings at all.

■ Use the distinction

- The speaker accepts going and dismisses the challenge.
- Tone may show defiance, resignation or indifference. The repeated verb does not mean the speaker has no feelings at all.

■ Try it with help closed

A friend challenges you to go; you agree defiantly. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 去就去，怕什么。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Tone may show defiance, resignation or indifference.
- The repeated verb does not mean the speaker has no feelings at all.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Action, 好 + Purpose (so that)

■ Make a later action easier

- You suggest sleeping early to make an early start possible.
- 早点睡，好早起。 – 好 introduces the purpose served by sleeping early.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is Action, 好 + Purpose (so that). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

早点睡，好早起。

zǎo diǎn shuì hǎo zǎo qǐ

Word guide: 早点 – earlier; 睡 – sleep; 好 – so that; 早起 – get up early.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 早点睡，好早起。: 好 introduces the purpose served by sleeping early.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- This is purpose, not a claim that the early start has happened.
- The adjective 好 in 他很好 is a different use.

■ Use the distinction

- 好 introduces the purpose served by sleeping early.
- This is purpose, not a claim that the early start has happened. The adjective 好 in 他很好 is a different use.

■ Try it with help closed

You suggest sleeping early to make an early start possible. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 早点睡，好早起。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- This is purpose, not a claim that the early start has happened.
- The adjective 好 in 他很好 is a different use.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

一面 ... ， 一面 ... (two things at once)

■ Two actions overlap in time

- Someone talks on the phone while walking.
- 他一面走，一面打电话。 – The walking and phoning occur alongside each other.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 一面 ... ， 一面 ... (two things at once). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

他一面走，一面打电话。

tā yí miàn zǒu yí miàn dǎ diàn huà

Word guide: 他 – he; 一面 – while; 走 – walk; 一面 – and; 打电话 – phone.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 他一面走，一面打电话。: The walking and phoning occur alongside each other.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- The frame indicates overlapping actions, not a sequence where the first must end before the second starts.
- The overlap need not mean identical start and finish times.

■ Use the distinction

- The walking and phoning occur alongside each other.
- The frame indicates overlapping actions, not a sequence where the first must end before the second starts. The overlap need not mean identical start and finish times.

■ Try it with help closed

Someone talks on the phone while walking. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 他一面走，一面打电话。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- The frame indicates overlapping actions, not a sequence where the first must end before the second starts.
- The overlap need not mean identical start and finish times.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

不是 ... ， 就是 ... (either ... or ...)

■ An asserted pair of alternatives may still be mistaken

- A friend guesses someone is either reading or sleeping.
- 他不是在睡觉，就是在看书。 – The speaker presents those two alternatives as the possibilities.

■ Build the form

- The pattern in this lesson is 不是 ... ， 就是 ... (either ... or ...). Locate it in the original interlinear examples below.
- Keep the words in their demonstrated positions; the pattern must fit the intended situation as well as the sentence form.

他不是在睡觉，就是在看书。

tā bú shì zài shuì jiào jiù shì zài kàn shū

Word guide: 他 – he; 不是 – either; 在 – (doing); 睡觉 – sleep; 就是 – or; 在 – (doing); 看书 – read.

■ Read examples in context

- In the opening example, 他不是在睡觉, 就是在看书。: The speaker presents those two alternatives as the possibilities.
- Explain who acts, what is described and which time or group is relevant before choosing an English paraphrase.

■ Know the boundary

- This is the speaker's account, which can be wrong.
- It does not prove that other activities are impossible in reality.

■ Use the distinction

- The speaker presents those two alternatives as the possibilities.
- This is the speaker's account, which can be wrong. It does not prove that other activities are impossible in reality.

■ Try it with help closed

A friend guesses someone is either reading or sleeping. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

One possible response: 他不是在睡觉, 就是在看书。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- This is the speaker's account, which can be wrong.
- It does not prove that other activities are impossible in reality.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.