

Comparing similar prepositions

Ref Hsk5 Grammar

朝 vs 向 vs 往 — “towards, facing”

All three mark **direction**. **Before** a verb in plain directional use they're interchangeable (往 / 向 / 朝前走). **After** a verb (开往, 飞往), **往** marks the **destination** and is the most common; **向** marks direction; **朝** can't go after a verb. Only **向** stretches to abstract aims (向 ... 学习).

{zh: 往 |wǎng / 前 |qián|forward / 走 |zǒu|walk / 十 |shí|ten / 分钟 |fēn zhōng|minutes / 。 }

Walk forward for ten minutes.

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 地铁 |dì tiě|train / 是 |shì|is / 开往 |kāi wǎng|bound for / 浦东 |Pǔ dōng|Pudong / 机场 |jī chǎng|Airport / 的 |de / 吗 |ma / ? }

Is this train bound for Pudong Airport?

Remember: before the verb, all three tie (往/向/朝前走); after the verb, only 往 (destination: 开往北京) or 向 — 朝 can't follow a verb. And abstract “learn from / turn toward” is 向 alone: 向 ... 学习.

Watch out

- 朝 is the most restricted — keep it *before* the verb.

对 vs 对于 — “towards, regarding”

Near-synonyms for “towards / regarding.” **对** is flexible and can mark a person you *act on* (对他笑 “smile at him”). **对于** is more formal, frames only a **topic or object of attitude**, and can't take a direct personal target. Rule of thumb: anywhere 对于 fits, 对 fits too — not the reverse.

{zh: 对于 |duì yú|regarding / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 问题 |wèn tí|question / , 我 |wǒ|I / 没有 |méi yǒu|have no / 看法 |kàn fǎ|view / 。 }

As for this question, I've no opinion.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 对 |duì|at / 我 |wǒ|me / 笑 |xiào|smiled / 了 |le / 。 }

He smiled at me.

Remember: 对于 fits $\implies$ 对 fits — but NOT the reverse. A personal target (对他笑, “smile at him”) needs 对; 对于 only frames a topic/attitude (对于这个问题). When in doubt, 对 is the safer, broader one.

Watch out

- Don't put a person straight after 对于 as a target — 对他笑 ×, 对他笑 ✓.

关于 vs 对于 vs 至于 — three “regarding”s

关于 = the **topic / subject matter** (“about, on”); **对于** = the **target of an attitude** (“towards, regarding”); **至于** = a **transition** to a new topic (“as for, as to”).

{zh: 关于 |guān yú|about / 这 |zhè|this / 本 |běn / 书 |shū|book / , 我 |wǒ|I / 有 |yǒu|have / 些 |xiē / 想法 |xiǎng fǎ|thoughts / 。 }

About this book, I have some thoughts.

{zh: 至于 |zhì yú|as for / 价格 |jià gé|the price / , 以后 |yǐ hòu|later / 再 |zài / 说 |shuō|we'll talk / 。 }

As for the price, we'll discuss it later.

Remember: three jobs — **关于** = the **subject** (“about X”); **对于** = an **attitude aimed at X** (“towards X”); **至于** = a **switch to a new topic** (“as for X...”). Subject / attitude / topic-shift.

Watch out

- 至于 changes topic, it doesn't just name one — don't swap it in for 关于.

给 vs 为 — “for, to”

Both mean “for / to (someone).” **给** marks the **recipient** of a concrete action (给他打电话 “call him”); **为** marks the **beneficiary or reason**, more abstract (为他高兴 “happy for him”). 为 can't replace 给 in a “hand-to / call” action.

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 给 |gěi|to / 我 |wǒ|me / 拿 |ná|pass / 一双 |yì shuāng|a pair of / 筷子 |kuài zi|chopsticks / 。 }

Please pass me a pair of chopsticks.

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 都 |dōu|all / 为 |wèi|for / 你 |nǐ|you / 高兴 |gāo xìng|are happy / 。 }

We're all happy for you.

Remember: **给** = the **RECIPIENT** of a concrete action (hand to / call): 给他打电话; **为** = the **BENEFICIARY or reason**, abstract: 为他高兴. Something physically goes *to* someone $\rightarrow$ 给; you feel/act *on behalf of* someone $\rightarrow$ 为.

Watch out

- 为他打电话 sounds off for “call him” — a concrete handover/call wants 给.