

HSK 5 Grammar

English edition

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1 Adjectives

1.1 形容词 + 得不得了—”extremely, …to death”

得不得了 after an adjective cranks it to the extreme —”incredibly …, …to death.” On its own **不得了** means ”[oh no,] terrible!”, but as a complement it just intensifies, good or bad.

Structure: Adjective + 得不得了

{zh: 今天 |jīn tiān|today / 冷 |lěng|cold / 得不得了 |de bù dé liǎo|terribly / , 怎么 |zěn me|how / 会 |huì|can / 这么 |zhè me|so / 冷 |lěng|cold / ? }

It's terribly cold today —how can it be this cold?

{zh: 升职 |shēng zhí|the promotion / 让 |ràng|made / 他 |tā|him / 高兴 |gāo xìng|happy / 得不得了 |de bù dé liǎo|extremely / 。 }

Getting promoted made him over the moon.

Remember: **得不得了** = ”…like crazy.” It swings both ways —高兴得不得了 (over the moon) and 累得不得了 (dead on my feet) —and hits harder than 很 or 非常.

Watch out

- It needs the 得: 高兴**得**不得了, not 高兴不得了.

1.2 形容词 + 得很—”very, really”

得很 after an adjective is a casual, emphatic ”very, really” —a relaxed alternative to fronting 很, and a touch stronger.

Structure: Adjective + 得很

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 地方 |dì fang|place / 漂亮 |piào liang|gorgeous / 得很 |de hěn|really / , 推荐 |tuī jiàn|recommend / 你 |nǐ|you / 去 |qù|go / 。 }

This place is gorgeous —I really recommend you visit.

{zh: 别 |bié|don't / 担心 |dān xīn|worry / , 这次 |zhè cì|this / 考试 |kǎo shì|exam / 简单 |jiǎn dān|easy / 得很 |de hěn|really / 。 }

Don't worry —this exam is dead easy.

Remember: the intensifier **TRAILS** the adjective: **好得很** (not 很好得很). It's a casual, slightly stronger swap for a front 很—”好得很” lands like ”really good, honestly.”

Watch out

- Don't double up —pick a front 很 *or* a trailing 得很, never both.

1.3 形容词 + 了 + (一) 点儿—”a bit too …”

Tag 了 (一) 点儿 onto an adjective to say something is **a touch too** much —”a bit too …” It's softer than 太, so it's the polite way to grumble.

Structure: Adjective + 了 + (一) 点儿

{zh: 这件 |zhè jiàn|this / 衬衫 |chèn shān|shirt / 小 |xiǎo|small / 了 |le / 点儿 |diǎnr|a bit too / , 我 |wǒ|I / 想 |xiǎng|want / 换 |huàn|to swap / 一件 |yí jiàn|it / 。 }

This shirt's a bit too small —I'd like to swap it.

{zh: 那个 |nà ge|that / 地方 |dì fang|place / 离 |lí|from / 我家 |wǒ jiā|my home / 远 |yuǎn|far / 了 |le / 一点儿 |yì diǎnr|a bit too / 。 }

That place is a little too far from my home.

Remember: Adj + 了点儿 = "a bit TOO ..." —a gentle complaint, softer than 太. Don't confuse it with 有点儿 + Adj ("a bit ...," 有点儿大), which sits *before* the adjective.

Watch out

- Position flips the feel: 有点儿大 ("a bit big," before) vs 大了点儿 ("a bit too big," after).

1.4 有的是 + 名词—"have plenty of"

有的是 means there's **no shortage** of something —"have plenty of, have all the ...you need." It's emphatic, sometimes a touch boastful. Note: it's one fixed phrase, **not** 有的 ("some") + 是.

Structure: Subject + 有的是 + Noun

{zh: 别 |bié|don't / 急 |jí|rush / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 有的是 |yǒu de shì|have plenty of / 时间 |shí jiān|time / 。 }

Don't rush —we've all the time in the world.

{zh: 他 |tā|his / 爸 |bà|dad / 是 |shì|is / 大老板 |dà lǎo bǎn|a big boss / , 有的是 |yǒu de shì|has plenty of / 钱 |qián|money / 。 }

His dad's a big boss —he's got money to burn.

Remember: 有的是 = "got loads of" —confident, even boastful, far stronger than 有很多. It's a *single fixed phrase* —don't read it as 有的 ("some") + 是.

Watch out

- It takes a bare noun: 有的是时间 / 钱 / 人—no measure word needed.

2 Adverbs

2.1 都 (advanced) —“even / already / now that”

Beyond “all,” 都 moonlights in three ways: “even (to the point that)” (= 甚至); “already” (with a time, plus 了); and a tone of **complaint** (“now that …!”).

Structure: Subject + 都 + Predicate

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 难过 |nán guò|upset / 得 |de / 都 |dōu|even / 哭 |kū|cried / 了 |le / 。 }

He was so upset he even cried.

{zh: 都 |dōu|already / 半夜 |bàn yè|midnight / 了 |le / , 你 |nǐ|you / 怎么 |zěn me|how come / 还 |hái|still / 不 |bù|not / 睡 |shuì|asleep / ? }

It's the middle of the night already —why aren't you asleep?

Remember: three side-jobs for 都: “even” (= 甚至: 难过得都哭了), “already” (time + 了: 都半夜了), and a grumble (“now that…!”, 都怪你 “it's all your fault”).

Watch out

- The “already” sense needs a time phrase and a closing 了一都十点了.

2.2 还…呢 (advanced) —sarcasm and reproach

还 + predicate + 呢 drips with **surprise, sarcasm, or reproach** —“some …you are!, and you call yourself …!” It flags the gap between claim and reality.

Structure: Subject + 还 + Predicate / Noun + 呢

{zh: 还 |hái|some / 好朋友 |hǎo péng you|“good friend” / 呢 |ne / , 天天 |tiān tiān|every day / 说 |shuō|talks / 我 |wǒ|my / 坏话 |huài huà|behind my back / 。 }

Some “good friend” —bad-mouthing me every day.

{zh: 还 |hái|and he / 留过学 |liú guo xué|studied abroad / 呢 |ne / , 英语 |Yīng yǔ|his English / 这么 |zhè me|this / 差 |chà|bad / ! }

He even studied abroad, yet his English is this bad!

Remember: 还 X 呢 = “call yourself an X?!” —a sarcastic jab at the mismatch between the label and the reality. Almost always sealed with 呢, said with an eye-roll.

Watch out

- Tone is everything —without the mocking delivery it just reads as plain 还 (“still”).

2.3 总 (advanced) —“bound to, in the end”

Beyond “always,” 总 paired with 会 / 得 / 要 / 能 states something **concrete and inevitable** —“is bound to, will (in the end), has to.” It can't sit directly after the verb.

Structure: 总 + 会 / 得 / 要 / 能 + Verb Phrase (+ 的 / 吧)

{zh: 这里 |zhè lǐ|here / 是 |shì|is / 他 |tā|his / 家 |jiā|home / , 他 |tā|he / 总 |zǒng|is bound to / 会 |huì / 回来 |huí lái|come back / 的 |de / 。 }

This is his home —he's bound to come back.

{zh: 咱们 |zán men|we / 总 |zǒng|have got to / 得 |děi / 想 |xiǎng|think of / 个 |ge / 办法 |bàn fǎ|some plan / 吧 |ba / 。 }

We've got to come up with some kind of solution.

Remember: 总 + 会/得/要/能 = "bound to / has got to." 总会回来的 ("bound to come back"), 总得想办法 ("have got to find a way") —a settled sense of inevitability.

Watch out

- Pair it with an auxiliary —总 can't sit bare right before a main verb here.

2.4 毕竟—"after all"

毕竟 reaches for a **basic fact** to justify a judgement —"after all, when all's said and done." At home in speech and writing alike.

Structure: …… , 毕竟…… . 毕竟……

{zh: 别 |bié|don't / 骂 |mà|scold / 他 |tā|him / 了 |le / , 他 |tā|he / 毕竟 |bì jìng|after all / 是 |shì|is / 孩子 |hái zi|a child / 。 }

Stop scolding him —he's only a kid, after all.

{zh: 毕竟 |bì jìng|after all / 是 |shì|it's / 冬天 |dōng tiān|winter / , 多 |duō|more / 穿 |chuān|wear / 点 |diǎn / 吧 |ba / 。 }

It's winter, after all —dress more warmly.

Remember: 毕竟 = "after all" —it pulls out an undeniable fact you shouldn't forget, to excuse or explain (他毕竟是孩子, "he's only a child, after all").

Watch out

- It justifies, it doesn't conclude —pair it with the fact, not the result.

2.5 差点没 + 动词—"almost didn't"

差点没 is 差点 + 没—and for a **desired** result it flips to good news: you **nearly failed but pulled it off**. Read the 没 as part of the verb: "almost didn't [verb]." No 了 after.

Structure: Subject + 差点 + 没 + Verb Phrase

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 差点 |chà diǎn|almost / 没 |méi|didn't / 赶上 |gǎn shàng|catch / 火车 |huǒ chē|the train / 。 }

I almost missed the train (but caught it).

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 差点 |chà diǎn|barely / 没 |méi / 通过 |tōng guò|passed / 考试 |kǎo shì|the exam / 。 }

He barely passed the exam.

Remember: for a **wanted** outcome, 差点没 = "nearly failed, but made it" (差点没赶上 = *caught* it!). For an **unwanted** one, plain 差点 (no 没) = "nearly happened, didn't" (差点迟到 = wasn't late). The 没 with a good result is the twist.

Watch out

- It's the classic exam trap — 差点没赶上 means you *did* catch it, despite the 没.

2.6 反正—"anyway, in any case"

反正 sweeps the alternatives off the table —"anyway, regardless, either way." Whatever the options, the result stands. It often follows a comma and teams up with 不管.

Structure: [Disregarded situation] , 反正……

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 信 |xìn|believe / 不 |bù|or not / 信 |xìn| / , 反正 |fǎn zhèng|anyway / 我 |wǒ|I / 信 |xìn|do / 了 |le| / 。 }

Believe it or not — anyway, I do.

{zh: 不管 |bù guǎn|however / 多 |duō|far / 远 |yuǎn|it is / , 反正 |fǎn zhèng|anyway / 我 |wǒ|I / 要 |yào|will / 去 |qù|go / 。 }

However far it is, I'm going anyway.

Remember: 反正 = "either way, my mind's made up." It brushes the options aside —the outcome doesn't depend on them. It pairs naturally with 不管 / 无论 ("no matter …, 反正 …").

Watch out

- It signals a settled decision —don't use it where the choice genuinely matters.

2.7 尽量 + 动词—"as much as possible"

尽量 means push something **to the limit of what you can** —"as much as possible, do one's best to." It sits before a verb or adjective.

Structure: 尽量 + Verb / Adjective

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 会 |huì|will / 尽量 |jǐn liàng|do my best to / 帮 |bāng|help / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

I'll do my best to help you.

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 尽量 |jǐn liàng|as much as possible / 早 |zǎo|early / 点 |diǎn| / 来 |lái|come / 。 }

Please come as early as you can.

Remember: 尽 (exhaust) + 量 (amount) = "give it all you've got." It promises effort within limits —"I'll do what I can." 尽量早点来 = "come as early as you can manage."

Watch out

- It's "as much as possible," not a guarantee —it quietly admits there's a limit.

2.8 互相 + 动词—“each other”

互相 marks a **two-way** action —“(do to) each other, mutually.” It usually leads a two-syllable verb; a one-syllable verb needs more material after it.

Structure: 互相 + Verb

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 应该 |yīng gāi|should / 互相 |hù xiāng|each other / 帮助 |bāng zhù|help / 。 }

We should help each other.

{zh: 同学 |tóng xué|classmates / 之间 |zhī jiān|among / 要 |yào|should / 互相 |hù xiāng|one another / 尊重 |zūn zhòng|respect / 。 }

Classmates should respect one another.

Remember: 互相 = “mutually, each other” —a back-and-forth action, usually with a two-syllable verb: 互相帮助, 互相了解, 互相尊重.

Watch out

- A one-syllable verb after 互相 feels bare —prefer the two-syllable form (互相帮助, not 互相帮).

2.9 尽管 + 动词—“feel free to”

Here **尽管** means “**feel free to, go right ahead**” —urging someone not to hold back. (A completely different sense from 尽管 = “although.”)

Structure: 尽管 + Verb

{zh: 有 |yǒu|if you have / 什么 |shén me|any / 问题 |wèn tí|questions / 尽管 |jǐn guǎn|feel free to / 问 |wèn|ask / 。 }

Feel free to ask if you have any questions.

{zh: 有 |yǒu|if you need / 什么 |shén me|any- / 事 |shì|thing / 尽管 |jǐn guǎn|don't hesitate to / 找 |zhǎo|come to / 我 |wǒ|me / 。 }

Don't hesitate to come to me if you need anything.

Remember: this 尽管 = “go right ahead, don't hold back” (有问题尽管问) —not the “although” of 尽管…但是…。 Same word, two unrelated jobs; context picks.

Watch out

- It's encouragement, so it leads a bare verb —don't pair it with 但是 here.

2.10 干脆 + 动词—“just (do it), might as well”

干脆 proposes a **clean, decisive** way out of a fiddly spot —“might as well, just (do this).” The feeling: stop overthinking and *just*.

Structure: Subject + 干脆 + Verb Phrase

{zh: 家里 |jiā lǐ|at home / 什么 |shén me|nothing / 都 |dōu / 没有 |méi yǒu|there is / , 干脆 |gān cuì|let's just / 出去 |chū qù|go out / 吃 |chī|to eat / 吧 |ba / 。 }

There's nothing at home —let's just eat out.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 电脑 |diàn nǎo|computer / 又 |yòu|again / 坏 |huài|broke / 了 |le / , 干脆 |gān cuì|might as well / 买 |mǎi|buy / 台 |tái|a / 新的 |xīn de|new one / 吧 |ba / 。 }

This computer broke again —might as well buy a new one.

Remember: 干脆 = "just do it / might as well" —it cuts the dithering and picks the cleanest, most decisive option (干脆买个新的吧).

Watch out

- It's a decisive *suggestion* —it usually closes with 吧.

2.11 再也 + 不 / 没…了 — "never again"

再也不 / 没…了 slams the door —"never …again." The final 了 (change of state) seals the determination or the settled fact.

Structure: Subject + 再也 + 不 / 没 + Verb Phrase + 了

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 再也 |zài yě|never again / 不 |bù / 想 |xiǎng|want to / 看到 |kàn dào|see / 你 |nǐ|you / 了 |le / ! }

I never want to see you again!

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 走 |zǒu|left / 了 |le / , 再也 |zài yě|never / 没 |méi|did / 回来 |huí lái|come back / 。 }

He left and never came back.

Remember: 再也不…了 = "never AGAIN" (future); 再也没…了 = "never did again" (past). The closing 了 slams the door shut on it.

Watch out

- Match the negative to the time: future intention → 不; past fact → 没.

2.12 曾经 + 动词 + 过 — "once, formerly"

曾经 plants an experience **firmly in the past** —"once (upon a time), formerly, ever." It usually pairs with 过. To negate, use the formal 不曾 / 未曾 — **never** 没曾经.

Structure: Subject + 曾经 + Verb + 过 · 曾经 + 是 / 在 / 有…

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 曾经 |céng jīng|once / 是 |shì|was / 我 |wǒ|my / 老板 |lǎo bǎn|boss / 。 }

He was once my boss.

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 曾经 |céng jīng|once / 一起 |yì qǐ|together / 去 |qù|went / 过 |guo / 。 }

We once went there together.

Remember: 曾经…过 = "once, formerly" —a closed chapter in the past. The negative is the *formal* 不曾 / 未曾, never 没曾经. With 是 / 在 / 有, drop the 过 (曾经是…).

Watch out

- 曾经 is more written/weighty than a plain past with 过—reserve it for "once upon a time" distance.

2.13 再三 + 动词—"repeatedly"

再三 means doing something **again and again** —"repeatedly, time and again." It's formal, usually before a two-syllable verb of speech or thought, and usually without 了 / 过.

Structure: 再三 + Verb Phrase

{zh: 老师 |lǎo shī|the teacher / 再三 |zài sān|repeatedly / 强调 |qiáng diào|stressed / 这次 |zhè cì|this / 考试 |kǎo shì|exam / 很 |hěn|very / 重要 |zhòng yào|important / 。 }

The teacher stressed again and again that this exam matters.

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 决定 |jué dìng|decision / 是 |shì|was / 经过 |jīng guò|after / 再三 |zài sān|much / 考虑 |kǎo lù|deliberation / 做出来 |zuò chū lái|made / 的 |de / 。 }

This decision was made after much deliberation.

Remember: 再三 = 再 + 三 = "two, three times over" = "again and again." Formal, and it loves verbs of speech/thought: 再三强调, 再三考虑, 再三感谢.

Watch out

- Keep it for two-syllable verbs in a formal register —in casual speech you'd use 一再 or 老是.

2.14 简直—"simply, literally"

简直 voices **amazement or exaggeration** —"simply, just, downright." It precedes the over-the-top claim, often with 太…了. With 是 it means "basically."

Structure: Subject + 简直 + Predicate · 简直 + 是 + …

{zh: 这里 |zhè lǐ|this place / 简直 |jiǎn zhí|simply / 是 |shì|is / 天堂 |tiān táng|heaven / ! }

This place is simply heaven!

{zh: 你 |nǐ|your / 男朋友 |nán péng you|boyfriend / 简直 |jiǎn zhí|just / 太 |tài|too / 帅 |shuài|handsome / 了 |le / ! }

Your boyfriend is just gorgeous!

Remember: 简直 = a gasp of "simply / downright / I can't even." It signals exaggeration, often with 太…了 (简直太美了). 简直是 = "basically is / amounts to" (简直是骗人).

Watch out

- It's for hyperbole —drop it into a measured statement and it sounds overcooked.

2.15 顺便 + 动词—"while you're at it"

顺便 tacks on a **second, convenient** action —"while you're at it, in passing, on the way." 顺便说一下 / 顺便问一下 = "by the way."

Structure: Subject + Verb Phrase 1 , 顺便 + Verb Phrase 2

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 去 |qù|go / 买 |mǎi|buy / 早饭 |zǎo fàn|breakfast / 顺便 |shùn biàn|while you're at it / 帮 |bāng / 我 |wǒ|me / 带 |dài|grab / 杯 |bēi|a / 咖啡 |kā fēi|coffee / 吧 |ba / 。 }

While you're out for breakfast, grab me a coffee.

{zh: 顺便 |shùn biàn|by the way / 说 |shuō|mention / 一下 |yí xià / , 我 |wǒ|I / 最近 |zù jìn|recently / 搬家 |bān jiā|moved / 了 |le / 。 }

By the way, I moved recently.

Remember: 顺便 = "along the way, no extra trip" —the second action piggybacks on the first. 顺 = "go with the flow," so 顺便 = "while the going's that way anyway." 顺便说一下 = "by the way."

Watch out

- The two actions must genuinely fit together —顺便 implies *no* extra effort.

2.16 再不…就…(了) —"if …not soon, then …"

再不…就… warns of a **closing window** —"act now, or else." It's literally future 再 + 就 ("then"), and it carries urgency even without 现在.

Structure: (Subject +) 再不…就… (了)

{zh: 再不 |zài bù|if …not now / 走 |zǒu|leave / 就 |jiù|then / 迟到 |chí dào|be late / 了 |le / 。 }

If we don't leave now, we'll be late.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 再不 |zài bù|if …not now / 努力 |nǔ lì|work hard / 就 |jiù|then / 考不上 |kǎo bu shàng|won't get in / 了 |le / 。 }

If you don't work hard now, you won't get in.

Remember: 再不…就…了 = "if you don't …NOW, then …!" —a ticking-clock warning with an implied "now." 再不走就迟到了 ("if we don't go now, we'll be late").

Watch out

- Different from the "again" 再—here 再不 = "(if) not any longer / not now."

2.17 好(不)容易 + 才—“with great difficulty”

A genuine head-scratcher: **好容易** and **好不容易** mean the **same** thing —“with great effort, finally managed to (after a struggle).” The 不 is *not* a negative here. It usually pairs with 才.

Structure: Subject + 好(不)容易 + 才 + Result

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 好不容易 |hǎo bù róng yì|after a real struggle / 才 |cái / 买到 |mǎi dào|got / 票 |piào|tickets / 。 }

I only got tickets after a real struggle.

{zh: 好不容易 |hǎo bù róng yì|finally, with great effort / 才 |cái / 到 |dào|reached / 市中心 |shì zhōng xīn|downtown / , 发现 |fā xiàn|realised / 没 |méi|hadn't / 带 |dài|brought / 手机 |shǒu jī|my phone / 。 }

I finally got downtown —then realised I'd left my phone.

Remember: **好容易 = 好不容易**—both mean “only just managed, after a real struggle.” That 不 is a red herring, *not* a negative. Both pair with 才 (好不容易才买到票).

Watch out

- Don't “fix” the 不—好不容易才到 means it was *hard* to arrive, not easy.

2.18 白 + 动词—“in vain, for nothing”

白 before a (usually one-syllable) verb means the effort was **wasted** —“(did) in vain, for nothing.” It often takes 了. (白 can also mean “for free.”)

Structure: 白 + Verb (+ 了)

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 没 |méi|didn't / 来 |lái|come / , 我 |wǒ|I / 白 |bái|in vain / 等 |děng|waited / 了 |le / 一个 |yí ge|an / 小时 |xiǎo shí|hour / 。 }

He didn't come —I waited an hour for nothing.

{zh: 白 |bái|wasted / 花 |huā|spending / 了 |le / 一百 |yì bǎi|a hundred / 块 |kuài|kuai / , 这 |zhè|these / 衣服 |yī fu|clothes / 不能 |bù néng|can't / 穿 |chuān|be worn / 。 }

Wasted a hundred kuai —these clothes can't even be worn.

Remember: 白 + verb = effort that drew a **BLANK** —白等 (waited for nothing), 白跑 (a wasted trip), 白花钱 (money down the drain). 白 also means “for free” (白吃白住) —context tells which.

Watch out

- Usually one-syllable verbs: 白跑, 白等, 白做, 白花.

2.19 动词 + 了 + 又 + 动词—“over and over (in the past)”

Repeat a single-syllable verb around 了…又… to paint a **drawn-out, repeated** past action —“…ed and …ed.” It's often chased by 还是 / 就是 (“but still …”).

Structure: Subject + Verb + 了 + 又 + (same) Verb , (还是 / 就是) ……

{zh: 这个人 |zhè ge rén|this person / 我 |wǒ|I / 看 |kàn|looked / 了 |le / 又 |yòu|and / 看 |kàn|looked / , 还是 |hái shì|still / 不 |bù|don't / 认识 |rèn shi|recognise / 。 }

I looked and looked, but still don't know him.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 想 |xiǎng|thought / 了 |le / 又 |yòu|and / 想 |xiǎng|thought / , 最后 |zù hòu|in the end / 还是 |hái shì|still / 没 |méi|didn't / 去 |qù|go / 。 }

He thought it over and over, and in the end still didn't go.

Remember: V 了又 V = "…ed and …ed (and still…)" —a single-syllable verb worn down by repetition (看了又看, 想了又想). The 了 sits after the *first* verb; 还是 / 就是 often follows to say nothing changed.

Watch out

- Single-syllable verbs only (看, 想, 问, 找, 试) —the doubling is what shows the repetition.

2.20 差很多—“differ a lot” (opposite of 差不多)

Where 差不多 = “about the same,” 差很多 says two things are **far apart** —“very different, not the same at all.”

Structure: Subject + 差很多 · A + 跟 / 和 + B + 差很多

{zh: 中 |Zhōng|Chinese / 西方 |xī fāng|and Western / 的 |de / 文化 |wén huà|cultures / 差很多 |chà hěn duō|differ a lot / 。 }

Chinese and Western cultures are very different.

{zh: 这 |zhè|these / 两个 |liǎng ge|two / 词 |cí|words / 意思 |yì si|in meaning / 差不多 |chà bu duō|about the same / , 但 |dàn|but / 用法 |yòng fǎ|in usage / 差很多 |chà hěn duō|differ a lot / 。 }

These two words mean about the same, but are used very differently.

Remember: 差 (difference) 很多 (a lot) = “miles apart” —the exact flip of 差不多 (“not much difference”). Same 差, opposite size of gap.

Watch out

- It's a *gap* word —for “different in kind,” 不一样 / 不同 fit better.

3 Auxiliary Words

3.1 ……啊, ……啊—listing with 啊

Drop 啊 after each item and you get a casual, **rattling-off** feel —“what with …, and …, you know, that kind of thing.” It marks a **non-exhaustive** list, and can be capped with 什么的 (but not the formal 等等).

Structure: Item 1 + 啊, Item 2 + 啊, ……(+ 什么的)

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 什么 |shén me|all sorts of / 零食 |líng shí|snacks / 都 |dōu / 有 |yǒu|have / , 花生 |huā shēng|peanuts / 啊 |a / , 瓜子 |guā zǐ|seeds / 啊 |a / , 薯片 |shǔ piàn|crisps / 啊 |a / 。 }

We've got all sorts of snacks —peanuts, seeds, crisps, you name it.

{zh: 椅子 |yǐ zi|chairs / 啊 |a / , 桌子 |zhuō zi|tables / 啊 |a / , 电脑 |diàn nǎo|computers / 啊 |a / 什么的 |shén me de|and so on / , 都 |dōu|all / 买好 |mǎi hǎo|bought / 了 |le / 。 }

Chairs, tables, computers and so on —all bought.

Remember: …啊…啊 = a relaxed “what with X, Y, you know…” —each 啊 is a verbal breath between items, a casual non-exhaustive list. Cap it with 什么的 if you like, but never the stiff 等等.

Watch out

- It's chatty —too informal for a formal list (use 等 / 等等 there).

4 Conjunctions

4.1 要不 + Suggestion + 吧—”how about, or else”

要不 floats an **alternative suggestion** —”how about …, or else …, why don’t we ….” It quietly seeks the listener’s consent, can open the sentence or follow the reason, and usually closes with 吧.

Structure: Reason / Situation , 要不 + Suggestion + 吧 · 要不 + Suggestion , Reason

{zh: 大家 |dà jiā|everyone / 都 |dōu / 有点 |yǒu diǎn|a bit / 累 |lèi|tired / 了 |le / , 要不 |yào bù|how about / 休息 |xiū xi|rest / 一会儿 |yí huìr|a while / 吧 |ba / 。 }

Everyone’s a bit tired —how about we rest a while?

{zh: 这里 |zhè lǐ|here / 太 |tài|too / 吵 |chǎo|noisy / 了 |le / , 要不 |yào bù|how about / 我们 |wǒ men|we / 换 |huàn|change / 个 |ge / 地方 |dì fang|place / 吧 |ba / ? }

It’s too loud here —how about we go somewhere else?

Remember: 要不 = ”how about / or else…” —a gentle plan-B that asks for agreement, softer than a flat 我们…吧. Read it as ”if not (this), then…”. Don’t confuse it with 要不是 (”if it weren’t for”) or 要不然 (”otherwise”).

Watch out

- The 吧 is what makes it a *suggestion* rather than a demand —keep it.

5 Nouns

5.1 当中—”among, in the middle of”

当中 means ”among, in the midst of” —picking out a position **within** a group or space. With a group it’s ”of all …”; it can also be physically ”in the centre,” or ”in the middle of (a process).”

Structure: Group / Place / Process + 当中

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 是 |shì|are / 我 |wǒ|my / 所有 |suǒ yǒu|all / 朋友 |péng you|friends / 当中 |dāng zhōng|of / 最 |zuì|the most / 聪明 |cōng míng|clever / 的 |de / 。 }

Of all my friends, you’re the cleverest.

{zh: 他们 |tā men|them / 当中 |dāng zhōng|among / 很多 |hěn duō|many / 都 |dōu / 是 |shì|are / 上海人 |Shàng hǎi rén|Shanghainese / 。 }

Many of them are Shanghainese.

Remember: 当中 = ”in the midst of” —of a *group* (”of all…”: 朋友当中), a *space* (”in the centre”: 房间当中), or a *process* (”mid-…”: 谈判当中). It always sits *after* what it’s inside.

Watch out

- It comes after the group/place, not before: 朋友当中 , not 当中朋友.

5.2 彼此 + 动词—”each other, one another”

彼此 (literally ”that and this”) means ”each other, both sides” —a slightly **formal** cousin of 互相. As an object it wants a two-syllable verb; it can also stand alone.

Structure: 彼此 + Verb · Verb + 彼此

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 只 |zhǐ|only / 见过 |jiàn guo|have met / 一次 |yí cì|once / , 彼此 |bǐ cǐ|each other / 不 |bù|don’t / 太 |tài|very / 了解 |liǎo jiě|know / 。 }

We’ve only met once —we don’t know each other well.

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 应该 |yīng gāi|should / 彼此 |bǐ cǐ|each other / 信任 |xìn rèn|trust / 。 }

We should trust each other.

Remember: 彼此 = ”that-and-this” = **each other** —the formal sibling of 互相, with a two-syllable verb (信任, 了解, 尊重). Bonus idiom: 彼此彼此 = ”likewise / same to you.”

Watch out

- Formal register —in everyday speech 互相 is more natural.

5.3 Time / Event + 以来—“ever since, since”

以来 marks a stretch of time running **from a past point right up to now** —“(ever) since.” It usually opens the sentence; in formal writing it can be bracketed as 自(从)…以来.

Structure: Time / Event + 以来, ……

{zh: 结婚 |jié hūn|getting married / 以来 |yǐ lái|since / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 没 |méi|haven't / 吵过 |chǎo guo|had / 架 |jià|a fight / 。 }

Since we got married, we haven't had a single fight.

{zh: 上 |shàng|starting / 大学 |dà xué|university / 以来 |yǐ lái|since / , 他 |tā|he / 变 |biàn|has changed / 了 |le / 很多 |hěn duō|a lot / 。 }

Since starting university, he's changed a lot.

Remember: 以来 = “from (then) up to NOW” —a continuous run reaching the present (结婚以来, 上大学以来). In writing, wrap it: 自从…以来. Set phrases: 长期以来 (“for ages now”), 有史以来 (“since history began”).

Watch out

- It implies the period reaches the present —for a closed past span, use 的时候 / 那时.

5.4 当…的时候—“when, at the time of”

当…的时候 frames **when** something happens —“when, at the moment that.” 当 opens it; 的时候 (or just 时) closes it.

Structure: 当 + Event + 的时候, ……

{zh: 当 |dāng|when / 我 |wǒ|I / 看到 |kàn dào|saw / 这 |zhè|this / 张 |zhāng / 照片 |zhào piàn|photo / , 我 |wǒ|I / 就 |jiù|immediately / 想起 |xiǎng qǐ|thought of / 了 |le / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

When I saw this photo, I immediately thought of you.

{zh: 当 |dāng|when / 弟弟 |dì dì|my little brother / 饿 |è|is hungry / 的时候 |de shí hou / , 他 |tā|he / 就 |jiù / 会 |huì|will / 大声 |dà shēng|loudly / 哭 |kū|cry / 。 }

When my little brother is hungry, he cries loudly.

Remember: 当…的时候 = a pair of brackets around “when…” (当 opens, 的时候 closes). The 当 is optional but adds a formal, narrative ring; 的时候 can shrink to 时.

Watch out

- Don't leave 当 dangling without its 的时候 / 时—they work as a pair.

5.5 名词 + 这个 + Category —name-calling with 这个

Slot **这个 + category** after a name or pronoun and it adds a **wry, evaluative** colour —“you, …of a …, this so-called ….” It paints the noun with the speaker's attitude, fond or critical.

Structure: Noun / Pronoun + 这个 + Category

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 人 |rén|person / 啊 |a / , 太 |tài|too / 粗心 |cū xīn|careless / 了 |le / 。 }

You —you're just too careless.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 老师 |lǎo shī|teacher / 当 |dāng / 得 |de / 真 |zhēn|really / 不错 |bù cuò|good / 。 }

As a teacher, he's really rather good.

Remember: Noun + 这个 + category = identification *with an attitude* —你这个人啊… (“you —honestly!”). It's not neutral pointing; it carries the speaker's feeling, affectionate or exasperated.

Watch out

- Very colloquial —你这个人, 他这个孩子. In neutral identification you'd just drop the 这个.

6 Particles

6.1 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.

6.2 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

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

6.3 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.

6.4 ……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.

7 Prepositional Phrase

7.1 以上 / 以下 / 以内 / 以外—upper and lower limits

These "nouns of locality" set **limits** on a number, level, or rank. **以上** = "and above," **以下** = "and below," **以内** = "within," **以外** = "beyond." They come **after** the amount, and are generally **non-inclusive** (十岁以下 = under ten).

Structure: Amount / Level + 以上 / 以下 / 以内 / 以外

{zh: 十八岁 |shí bā suì|eighteen / 以上 |yǐ shàng|and over / 才 |cái|only then / 能 |néng|may / 进 |jìn|enter / 。 }

Only those eighteen and over may enter.

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 在 |zài|within / 三天 |sān tiān|three days / 以内 |yǐ nèi / 回复 |huí fù|reply / 。 }

Please reply within three days.

Remember: the limit word comes AFTER the amount (十岁以下, not 以下十岁), and it's generally **non-inclusive** (十岁以下 = *under* ten). Picture a number line: 以上 points up, 以下 down, 以内 stays inside, 以外 goes past.

Watch out

- 以内 = within a range; 以外 = beyond / except —don't mix the inside/outside pair.

8 Prepositions

8.1 (自) 从—“ever since” (a starting point)

自从 (or just 从) marks a **starting point in past time** —“ever since.” 自从 is the more formal of the two, and the clause often closes with 以后 or 起.

Structure: 自从 + Starting Point , ……

{zh: 自从 |zì cóng|ever since / 来到 |lái dào|coming to / 湖南 |Hú nán|Hunan / , 我 |wǒ|I / 越来越 |yuè lái yuè|more and more / 能 |néng|can / 吃辣 |chī là|take spice / 了 |le / 。 }

Ever since I came to Hunan, I can take more and more spice.

{zh: 自从 |zì cóng|ever since / 他 |tā|he / 走 |zǒu|left / 了 |le / 以后 |yǐ hòu / , 公司 |gōng sī|the company / 好 |hǎo|better / 多 |duō / 了 |le / 。 }

Ever since he left, the company's much better.

Remember: (自) 从 = the **START POINT** (“ever since…”); 以来 = the **PERIOD running from it**. 自从他走了 (“since he left”) sets the point; …以来 stresses the span up to now. 自从 is the formal one.

Watch out

- The clause often closes with 以后 / 起—自从…以后, marking the start clearly.

8.2 为 + Person + Predicate —“for (someone)”

为 (wèi) marks a **beneficiary** —“for, on behalf of.” Keep it apart from 为了 (“in order to”), which marks a *purpose*.

Structure: 为 + Party + Verb / Adjective

{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.

{zh: 谁 |shéi|who / 为 |wèi|for / 我 |wǒ|me / 考虑 |kǎo lù|has thought / 过 |guo / ? }

Who's ever thought of me?

Remember: 为 + person = “for / on behalf of” (a beneficiary): 为你高兴; 为了 + goal = “in order to” (a purpose). Person who benefits → 为; aim you're chasing → 为了.

Watch out

- 为你 (“for you”) vs 为了钱 (“for money / in order to get money”) —person vs goal.

8.3 对 + Person + 而言—“as far as …is concerned”

对…而言 frames a **point of view** —“for …, as far as …is concerned.” It's the formal twin of 对…来说.

Structure: 对 + Person / Group + 而言, ……

{zh: 这样 |zhè yàng|this kind of / 的 |de / 工作 |gōng zuò|job / 对 |duì|for / 我 |wǒ|me / 而言 |ér yán / 很 |hěn|very / 重要 |zhòng yào|important / 。 }

This kind of job is very important to me.

{zh: 对 |duì|for / 她 |tā|her / 而言 |ér yán / , 自由 |zì yóu|freedom / 更 |gèng|more / 重要 |zhòng yào|important / 。 }

For her, freedom matters even more.

Remember: 对…而言 = the formal 对…来说 (“from X’s point of view”). Save 而言 for writing; say 来说 in conversation.

Watch out

- It’s 对…而言, a fixed frame —the 而言 closes it, like 来说 does.

8.4 (包括) …在内—“including”

(包括) …在内 wraps items **into** a set —“including, …counted in.” The 在内 closes the bracket.

Structure: (包括) + Items + 在内, …… . …… , (包括) + Items + 在内

{zh: 包括 |bāo kuò|including / 他 |tā|his / 的 |de / 母语 |mǔ yǔ|native language / 在内 |zài nèi / , 他 |tā|he / 会 |huì|speaks / 说 |shuō / 四种 |sì zhǒng|four / 语言 |yǔ yán|languages / 。 }

Including his native language, he speaks four languages.

{zh: 水电费 |shuǐ diàn fèi|utilities / 在内 |zài nèi|included / , 我 |wǒ|my / 每月 |měi yuè|monthly / 房租 |fáng zū|rent / 三千五 |sān qiān wǔ|3,500 / 。 }

Including utilities, my rent is 3,500 a month.

Remember: 在内 closes the “counted in” bracket —(包括) X 在内 = “with X included.” Negate it with 不包括…在内 (“not counting…”). The 在内 is the lid on the box.

Watch out

- The 在内 is what completes it —包括…在内, not a bare 包括….

8.5 凭—“on the basis of, by”

凭 introduces **what one relies on or goes by** —“on the basis of, by virtue of, just because of.”

Structure: 凭 + Basis ……

{zh: 凭 |píng|with / 这张 |zhè zhāng|this / 票 |piào|ticket / 可以 |kě yǐ|you can / 进去 |jìn qù|go in / 。 }

With this ticket you can go in.

{zh: 凭 |píng|on what / 什么 |shén me|grounds / 我 |wǒ|I / 要 |yào|have to / 听 |tīng|listen to / 你 |nǐ|you / 的 |de / ? }

On what grounds do I have to listen to you?

Remember: 凭 = "going by / relying on" —凭票进入 ("by ticket"), 凭实力 ("on merit"). And the everyday challenge 凭什么? = "says who? / on what grounds?".

Watch out

- 凭什么 is confrontational —it pushes back, not a neutral "why".

8.6 至于—"as for, as to"

至于 swings to a new topic —"as for, when it comes to, as to."

Structure: 至于 + Topic , Comment

{zh: 至于 |zhì yú|as for / 价格 |jià gé|the price / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 以后 |yǐ hòu|later / 再 |zài|again / 谈 |tán|discuss / 。 }

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

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 同意 |tóng yì|agree / , 至于 |zhì yú|as for / 怎么 |zěn me|how / 做 |zuò|to do it / , 听 |tīng|it's up to / 你 |nǐ|you / 的 |de / 。 }

I agree; as for how to do it, it's up to you.

Remember: 至于 = a clean topic-switch ("as for X...") —it parks the last point and turns to a fresh one. Like English "as for...", it sits at the head of the new topic.

Watch out

- It introduces a *new* topic, not a contrast —don't use it where you mean "but".

8.7 给…给…—passive with 给

A 给 before the doer plus a 给 before the verb makes a colloquial **passive** —"(it) got ... ed (by someone)." The second 给 stands in for 被.

Structure: Receiver + 给 + Doer + 给 + Verb Phrase

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 的 |de / 蛋糕 |dàn gāo|cake / 给 |gěi|by / 弟弟 |dì dì|little brother / 给 |gěi / 吃 |chī|eaten / 了 |le / 。 }

My cake got eaten by my little brother.

{zh: 杯子 |bēi zi|the cup / 给 |gěi|by / 他 |tā|him / 给 |gěi / 打破 |dǎ pò|broken / 了 |le / 。 }

The cup got broken by him.

Remember: the second 给 被—给 (doer) 给 (verb) is a chatty passive: 蛋糕给弟弟给吃了 ("the cake got eaten by little brother"). Casual speech only.

Watch out

- It's colloquial —in writing use 被 (蛋糕被弟弟吃了).

8.8 就…(来说 / 而言) —”as far as …goes”

就…来说 / 而言 narrows the discussion to **one aspect** —”as far as …goes, in terms of ….”

Structure: 就 + Aspect + 来说 / 而言, ……

{zh: 就 |jiù|in terms of / 质量 |zhì liàng|quality / 来说 |lái shuō / , 这个 |zhè ge|this one / 更 |gèng / 好 |hǎo|better / 。 }

In terms of quality, this one's better.

{zh: 就 |jiù|as / 目前 |mù qián|things stand now / 而言 |ér yán / , 没有 |méi yǒu|there's no / 问题 |wèn tí|problem / 。 }

As things stand now, there's no problem.

Remember: 就 X 来说 / 而言 = ”in terms of X” —it zooms the lens onto a single aspect for the comment that follows (就质量来说…, 就目前而言…). This 就 isn't ”then” —it's ”regarding”.

Watch out

- Don't confuse this 就 with the time/quantity 就—here it's a topic-narrowing ”as regards”.

8.9 趁—”while, taking the chance”

趁 grabs a **favourable moment or condition** —”while, taking advantage of (the chance).”

Structure: 趁 + Situation / Opportunity ……

{zh: 趁 |chèn|while / 天气 |tiān qì|the weather / 好 |hǎo|good / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 去 |qù|go / 野餐 |yě cān|for a picnic / 吧 |ba / 。 }

While the weather's good, let's go for a picnic.

{zh: 趁 |chèn|while / 年轻 |nián qīng|you're young / , 多 |duō|more / 出去 |chū qù|go out / 走走 |zǒu zou|and see things / 吧 |ba / 。 }

While you're young, get out and see things.

Remember: 趁 = ”seize the moment / while it lasts” —grab the chance before it's gone. Set phrases nail the feel: 趁热吃 (”eat while it's hot”), 趁早 (”while there's still time”), 趁年轻.

Watch out

- It needs a *favourable* window —for a plain ”when,” use 当…的时候.

9 Sentence Patterns

9.1 要不是……(的话) , ……—”if it weren’t for”

要不是 sets up a **counterfactual** —”if it weren’t for …, (then) …” (如果不是). The second clause says what *would otherwise* have happened.

Structure: 要不是 + Condition (的话) , ……

{zh: 要不是 |yào bú shì|if it weren’t for / 你 |nǐ|you / , 我 |wǒ|I / 会 |huì|would / 迷路 |mí lù|get lost / 。 }

If it weren’t for you, I’d get lost.

{zh: 要不是 |yào bú shì|if it weren’t for / 堵车 |dǔ chē|the traffic / , 我 |wǒ|I / 早就 |zǎo jiù|already / 到 |dào|arrived / 了 |le / 。 }

If not for the traffic, I’d already be here.

Remember: 要不是 = ”if it weren’t for…” (= 如果不是) —an *unreal* condition that didn’t happen, with the result clause spelling out the road not taken. 要不是堵车, 我早就到了 (”if not for the traffic, I’d be there”).

Watch out

- It’s counterfactual —the condition is *contrary to fact* (there *was* traffic), so the result is what would have been.

9.2 多亏(了) —”thanks to, luckily”

多亏 gives **grateful credit** that a bad outcome was dodged —”thanks to, luckily (because of).” It often takes 了 and pairs with 不然 / 否则 (”otherwise”).

Structure: Good Outcome , 多亏(了) + Lucky Incident

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 没 |méi|wasn’t / 迟到 |chí dào|late / , 多亏 |duō kuī|thanks to / 了 |le / 你 |nǐ|you / 开车 |kāi chē|driving / 送 |sòng|me / 我 |wǒ / 。 }

I wasn’t late, thanks to you giving me a ride.

{zh: 多亏 |duō kuī|luckily / 你 |nǐ|you / 提醒 |tí xǐng|reminded me / , 不然 |bù rán|otherwise / 我 |wǒ|I / 肯定 |kěn dìng|surely / 忘 |wàng|forget / 了 |le / 。 }

Luckily you reminded me —otherwise I’d definitely have forgotten.

Remember: 多亏 = ”thanks to (you/it), disaster dodged.” It credits a *specific* person or thing (whereas 幸亏 thanks plain luck), and it loves a 不然 / 否则 to spell out the averted bad outcome.

Watch out

- It’s gratitude for a near-miss —pair it with the ”otherwise…” to show what was avoided.

9.3 (仅仅) 是……而已——“that’s all, merely”

End a sentence with **而已** to play the matter **down** —“merely …, that’s all, nothing more.” It often rides with 只是 / 就是 / 才.

Structure: (只是 / 就是 +) ……+ 而已

{zh: 一杯 |yì bēi|just a / 咖啡 |kā fēi|coffee / 而已 |ér yǐ|that’s all / , 别 |bié|don’t / 这么 |zhè me|so / 感动 |gǎn dòng|be moved / 。 }

It’s just a coffee —don’t be so touched.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 只是 |zhǐ shì|was just / 开 |kāi|making / 个 |ge / 玩笑 |wán xiào|a joke / 而已 |ér yǐ|that’s all / 。 }

I was only joking, that’s all.

Remember: 而已 deflates: “…and that’s ALL, no big deal.” It tags the end of a sentence, often after 只是 / 就是 (只是开玩笑**而已**), shrinking the thing to nothing much.

Watch out

- It minimises —don’t use it where you actually want to emphasise.

9.4 将—formal 把

In formal or written Chinese, **将** does the job of **把**, moving the object before the verb —“take (object) and ….”

Structure: Subject + 将 + Object + Verb Phrase

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 将 |jiāng / 这些 |zhè xiē|all the / 蛋糕 |dàn gāo|cake / 都 |dōu / 吃完 |chī wán|ate up / 了 |le / 。 }

He ate up all the cake.

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 将 |jiāng / 手机 |shǒu jī|your phone / 调 |tiáo|set / 成 |chéng|to / 静音 |jìng yīn|silent / 。 }

Please set your phone to silent.

Remember: 将 = the written-Chinese 把—same disposal job, formal register (将手机调成静音 = 把手机调成静音). You’ll meet it in notices and announcements. (将 also means future “will / shall” —a separate use.)

Watch out

- Keep it for formal/written contexts —in speech, 把 is the natural choice.

10 Verbs

10.1 动词 + 什么—challenging an action

A verb followed by 什么 (often the **same verb** again) is a **rhetorical, annoyed** pushback —”what are you …ing for? / stop …ing!” With a separable verb, 什么 splits the two halves.

Structure: Verb + 什么 + (same) Verb · Verb + 什么 + Object

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 哭 |kū|crying / 什么 |shén me|what for / 哭 |kū / , 又 |yòu|it's not as if / 不是 |bú shì / 没有 |méi yǒu|there's no / 你 |nǐ|your / 的 |de / 礼物 |lǐ wù|gift / 。 }

What are you crying for? It's not as if there's no gift for you.

{zh: 离 |lí|divorce / 什么 |shén me|what / 婚 |hūn / ! 你们 |nǐ men|you / 才 |cái|only / 结婚 |jié hūn|married / 三个月 |sān ge yuè|three months / 。 }

Divorce?! You've only been married three months!

Remember: V + 什么 (+ V) = an irritated ”what are you …ing for?!” —哭什么哭 (”quit crying!”), 急什么 (”what's the rush?!”). Separable verbs split around it: 离什么婚, 道什么歉.

Watch out

- It's blunt and familiar —fine between close friends/family, rude to strangers.

10.2 不像…这么 / 那么…—”not as …as”

像 means ”(just) like”; 不像 + B + 这么 / 那么 + Adj says A falls **short of B** on some quality —”not as …as B.”

Structure: Noun 1 + 像 + Noun 2 + 一样 + Adj · Noun 1 + 不像 + Noun 2 + 这么 / 那么 + Adj

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 有时候 |yǒu shí hou|sometimes / 像 |xiàng|like / 小孩 |xiǎo hái|a child / 一样 |yí yàng|just / 天真 |tiān zhēn|naive / 。 }

She's sometimes as naive as a child.

{zh: 今天 |jīn tiān|today / 不像 |bú xiàng|not as …as / 昨天 |zuó tiān|yesterday / 那么 |nà me|so / 冷 |lěng|cold / 。 }

Today isn't as cold as yesterday.

Remember: 像…一样 = ”just like”; 不像…那么… = ”not as …as.” 今天不像昨天那么冷 (”today isn't as cold as yesterday”). The 这么 / 那么 carries the degree being fallen short of.

Watch out

- It's a near-twin of the 没有…那么…comparison (HSK 3) —both say ”falls short of.”

10.3 比起 + B (+ 来) , A ~ —”compared with B, A ...”

比起…(来) opens a **comparison frame** —”compared with B, A is ….” It puts B forward as the yardstick. A variant is **(跟 / 和 / 与) B 相比**.

Structure: 比起 + B (+ 来) , A + Comment · (与) B 相比, A ~

{zh: 比起 |bǐ qǐ|compared with / 上海 |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / , 我 |wǒ|my / 老家 |lǎo jiā|hometown / 的 |de / 物价 |wù jià|prices / 便宜 |pián yi|cheaper / 多 |duō|much / 了 |le / 。 }

Compared with Shanghai, my hometown’s prices are much cheaper.

{zh: 与 |yǔ|compared with / 网络 |wǎng luò|online / 教学 |jiào xué|teaching / 相比 |xiāng bǐ / , 我 |wǒ|I / 更 |gèng / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|prefer / 面对面 |miàn duì miàn|face-to-face / 。 }

Compared with online teaching, I prefer face-to-face.

Remember: 比起 B (来) / 与 B 相比 = ”set against B, …” —it foregrounds the *yardstick* B, then delivers the verdict on A. The everyday cousin is 跟…比起来 (HSK 3).

Watch out

- It frames the comparison; for a plain ”A is more X than B,” a bare 比 (A 比 B…) is enough.

10.4 不如……—”not as good as / better to”

不如 has two jobs: ”A 不如 B (+ Adj)” = ”A isn’t as (good / …) as B”; and ”(与其… ,) 不如…” = ”(rather than …,) better to ….” Drop the adjective and 不如 just means ”not as good as.”

Structure: A + 不如 + B (+ Adj) · (与其…,) 不如…

{zh: 这件 |zhè jiàn|this / 裙子 |qún zi|dress / 不如 |bù rú|isn’t as …as / 那件 |nà jiàn|that one / 好看 |hǎo kàn|pretty / 。 }

This dress isn’t as pretty as that one.

{zh: 与其 |yǔ qí|rather than / 空想 |kōng xiǎng|daydream / , 不如 |bù rú|better to / 马上 |mǎ shàng|right away / 行动 |xíng dòng|act / 。 }

Rather than daydreaming, better to act right away.

Remember: 不如 = ”falls short of / better to.” A 不如 B = ”A isn’t as good as B” (我不如他, ”I’m no match for him”); 与其…不如… = ”rather than…, better to…”. With no adjective, it’s plain ”inferior to.”

Watch out

- 与其 sets up the rejected option, 不如 the preferred one —keep that order.

10.5 名词 / 形容词 + 化—”-ize, -ify”

The suffix **化** turns a noun or adjective into a **process verb** —”-ize, -ify, become.”

Structure: Noun / Adjective + 化

{zh: 城市 |chéng shì|cities / 现代化 |xiàn dài huà|are modernising / 得 |de / 很 |hěn|very / 快 |kuài|fast / 。 }

Cities are modernising fast.

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 要 |yào|want to / 把 |bǎ / 流程 |liú chéng|the process / 自动化 |zì dòng huà|automate / 。 }

We want to automate the process.

Remember: 化 = English "-ize / -ify" —bolt it on to get a "turn into" verb: 现代化 (modernize), 美化 (beautify), 自动化 (automate), 国际化 (internationalize), 多样化 (diversify).

Watch out

- It's a productive academic suffix —great for abstract/process nouns, odd on everyday ones.

10.6 算—"count as, consider"

算 judges that something **counts as** a category —"count as, be considered, qualify as." On its own, 算了 = "forget it."

Structure: Subject + 算 + Adjective / Category + 的

{zh: 在 |zài|in / 我们 |wǒ men|our / 班 |bān|class / , 他 |tā|he / 算 |suàn|counts as / 高 |gāo|tall / 的 |de / 。 }

In our class, he counts as tall.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 点 |diǎn|bit of / 钱 |qián|money / 不 |bù|isn't / 算 |suàn|counted as / 多 |duō|a lot / 。 }

This bit of money isn't much.

Remember: 算 = "reckons as / counts as" —算 ("calculate") used to *judge a category*: 他算高的 ("counts as tall"). And the everyday 算了 on its own = "forget it, let it go."

Watch out

- The category form often closes with 的: 算高的, 算便宜的.

10.7 难怪—"no wonder"

难怪 voices a sudden **realisation** —"no wonder, that explains why." It precedes the now-understood fact and often pairs with 原来.

Structure: 难怪 + Person / Fact ……

{zh: 难怪 |nán guài|no wonder / 他 |tā|he / 没 |méi|didn't / 来 |lái|come / , 原来 |yuán lái|it turns out / 生病 |shēng bìng|he's sick / 了 |le / 。 }

No wonder he didn't come —turns out he's ill.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 是 |shì|are / 新来 |xīn lái|new / 的 |de / , 难怪 |nán guài|no wonder / 我 |wǒ|I / 不 |bù|don't / 认识 |rèn shi|know / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

You're new —no wonder I don't know you.

Remember: 难怪 = "no wonder!" —the moment the penny drops. Literally 难 (hard) + 怪 (to blame): "can't blame it, given that...". It loves a 原来 to deliver the reason (难怪..., 原来...).

Watch out

- It introduces the *thing now explained*; the explanation follows (often with 原来).

11 Auxiliary verbs

11.1 将 / 将要 / 将会—formal future

将 (and 将要 / 将会) marks a **future** action in formal or written Chinese —“will, shall, is going to.” It’s the news-and-notice equivalent of the spoken 会 / 要.

Structure: Subject + 将 / 将要 / 将会 + Verb Phrase

{zh: 大会 |dà huì|the conference / 将 |jiāng|will / 于 |yú|on / 明天 |míng tiān|tomorrow / 开始 |kāi shǐ|begin / 。 }

The conference will begin tomorrow.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 将 |jiāng|will / 成为 |chéng wéi|become / 一个 |yí ge|a / 好 |hǎo|good / 爸爸 |bà ba|father / 。 }

He will make a good father.

Remember: 将 = the written “will” —the register of news and notices (大会将于明天开始); in speech you’d say 会 / 要. It combines freely: 将会, 将要, same meaning. (The very same 将 also serves as a formal 把—context decides.)

Watch out

- Reserve it for formal/written contexts —将 in casual chat sounds stiff.

12 Verb phrases

12.1 难免 + 动词—“hard to avoid, bound to”

难免 says something is **practically unavoidable** —“hard to avoid, inevitably, bound to (happen).” The outcome is usually negative-but-natural, and it often takes 会.

Structure: (Subject +) 难免 + (会) + Verb Phrase

{zh: 刚 |gāng|when you first / 开始 |kāi shǐ|start / 说 |shuō|speaking / 外语 |wài yǔ|a foreign language / , 难免 |nán miǎn|inevitably / 会 |huì / 有 |yǒu|have / 误会 |wù huì|misunderstandings / 。 }

Starting out in a foreign language, misunderstandings are inevitable.

{zh: 年轻人 |nián qīng rén|young people / 难免 |nán miǎn|are bound to / 会 |huì / 遇到 |yù dào|hit / 挫折 |cuò zhé|setbacks / 。 }

Young people are bound to face setbacks.

Remember: 难免 = 难 (hard) + 免 (to avoid) = “hard to avoid, bound to.” It carries a forgiving shrug —the (usually unwanted) outcome is only natural —and often takes a 会 (难免会有误会).

Watch out

- It’s for the *naturally inevitable*, with an understanding tone —not a flat “must”.

12.2 受 + 动词—passive with 受

受 before a (usually two-syllable) verb forms a **passive** —“be …ed, receive, suffer” (a role like 被). It’s common in formal phrasing and set words.

Structure: 受 + (Agent) + Verb

{zh: 张 |Zhāng|Teacher Zhang’s / 老师 |lǎo shī / 的 |de / 课 |kè|classes / 很 |hěn|very / 受 |shòu|are / 学生 |xué shēng|by students / 欢迎 |huān yíng|welcomed / 。 }

Teacher Zhang’s classes are very popular with students.

{zh: 这次 |zhè cì|this time / 他 |tā|he / 受 |shòu|got / 了 |le / 伤 |shāng|injured / 。 }

He got injured this time.

Remember: 受 = “receive / suffer” (a passive) —burn in the set words: 受欢迎 (“be welcomed / popular”), 受到影响 (“be affected”), 受伤 (“get hurt”), 受不了 (“can’t stand it”).

Watch out

- It mostly lives in fixed two-syllable combos —learn them as units rather than building 受 freely.

13 “But” Statements

13.1 ……，反而……—“on the contrary, instead”

反而 flags a result that runs **against expectation** —“on the contrary, instead, actually.” It’s an **adverb**, so it sits **after the subject and before the verb** (unlike the conjunction **但是**, which leads). It’s often the second half of a **不但 / 不仅 + 没…反而…** frame.

Structure: ……，Subject + 反而 + Unexpected Outcome

{zh: 吃 |chī|taking / 了 |le / 药 |yào|the medicine / ，病 |bìng|the illness / 反而 |fǎn ér|actually / 更 |gèng|even / 严重 |yán zhòng|worse / 了 |le / 。 }

After taking the medicine, the illness actually got worse.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 不但 |bú dàn|not only / 没 |méi|didn’t / 放弃 |fàng qì|give up / ，反而 |fǎn ér|but actually / 更 |gèng|even / 努力 |nǚ lì|harder / 了 |le / 。 }

Far from giving up, he actually worked even harder.

Remember: **反而** = “instead, the opposite of what you’d expect” —an adverb tucked *after the subject* (他反而…，never 反而他…). It often completes the frame **不但/不仅 + 没/不…，反而…** (“far from …ing, actually …”).

Watch out

- Don’t lead the sentence with it like English “instead” —it sits before the verb, inside the clause.

14 “Even If” Statements

14.1 就是……，也……—“even if”

就是…也… grants a **hypothetical** and says it **changes nothing** —“even if …, still ….” (One of a family with 即使, 就算, 哪怕.) Use it for a supposition, not an actual fact —for an actual present fact, use 虽然.

Structure: 就是 + Hypothetical , 也 + Action

{zh: 就是 |jiù shì|even if / 这台 |zhè tái|this / 电脑 |diàn nǎo|computer / 价格 |jià gé|costs / 上万 |shàng wàn|over 10,000 / , 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě|still / 会 |huì|will / 买 |mǎi|buy it / 。 }

Even if this computer costs over ten thousand, I'll still buy it.

{zh: 就是 |jiù shì|even if / 他 |tā|he / 变成 |biàn chéng|became / 穷光蛋 |qióng guāng dàn|penniless / , 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě|still / 愿意 |yuàn yì|would want / 跟 |gēn|to be with / 他 |tā|him / 在一起 |zài yì qǐ / 。 }

Even if he were penniless, I'd still want to be with him.

Remember: 就是…也… = “even if …still” —a hypothetical, in the same family as 即使 / 就算 / 哪怕, all needing the 也. A real, present fact takes 虽然, not 就是.

Watch out

- This 就是 is “even if,” not “is exactly” —the 也 downstream confirms the “even if” reading.

14.2 就算……，也……—“even if (granting)”

就算…也… is a colloquial “even if / even supposing” —often when the speaker **doubts** the hypothetical, or brushes it aside. 就算…又怎么样? = “even if …, so what?”; 就算再 + Adj + 也 = “no matter how Adj.”

Structure: 就算 + Hypothetical , 也 + Result · 就算 + 再 + Adj , 也…

{zh: 就算 |jiù suàn|even if / 你 |nǐ|you / 不想 |bù xiǎng|don't want to / 听 |tīng|hear it / , 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě|still / 要 |yào|will / 说 |shuō|say it / 。 }

Even if you don't want to hear it, I'm saying it.

{zh: 就算 |jiù suàn|even if / 他 |tā|he / 来 |lái|came / 了 |le / , 又 |yòu / 怎么样 |zěn me yàng|so what / ? }

Even if he did come —so what?

Remember: 就算 = “even supposing” —with a shrug of doubt or dismissal. 就算…又怎么样? = “even if so, so what?”; 就算再贵也… = “no matter how expensive…”. The colloquial cousin of 即使.

Watch out

- It often dismisses the hypothetical as not mattering —a slightly more “so what” tone than 即使.

14.3 哪怕……，也……—“even if (the extreme)”

哪怕…也… grants even the **most serious or extreme** case —“even if …, still ….” Its tone is **stronger** than 就算 / 即使. 哪怕再 + Adj + 也 = “no matter how Adj.”

Structure: 哪怕 + Extreme Hypothetical , 也 + Result

{zh: 哪怕 |nǎ pà|even if / 他 |tā|his / 爸爸 |bà ba|father / 是 |shì|were / 总统 |zǒng tǒng|president / , 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě|still / 不 |bù|wouldn't / 嫁给 |jià gěi|marry / 他 |tā|him / ! }

Even if his father were president, I wouldn't marry him!

{zh: 哪怕 |nǎ pà|no matter how / 再 |zài / 累 |lèi|tired / , 她 |tā|she / 也 |yě|still / 要 |yào|wants to / 健身 |jiàn shēn|work out / 。 }

However tired she is, she still works out.

Remember: 哪怕 = the **STRONGEST** “even if” —it reaches for the most extreme or far-fetched case (哪怕…是总统…). Lit. “what’s there to fear” → “even granting the worst.” 哪怕再 + Adj + 也 = “no matter how Adj.”

Watch out

- The three “even if”s scale up: 即使 (neutral) → 就算 (casual, doubtful) → 哪怕 (extreme).

15 "If" Statements

15.1 假如……, 就……—"if ...then ..."

假如…就… states a **hypothetical** —"if ..., then ...". It's a more **formal** sibling of 如果 / 要是, at home in both writing and speech.

Structure: 假如 + Statement , 就 + Result

{zh: 假如 |jiǎ rú|if / 我 |wǒ|I / 是 |shì|were / 你 |nǐ|you / , 我 |wǒ|I / 就 |jiù|would / 戒烟 |jiè yān|quit smoking / 。 }

If I were you, I'd quit smoking.

{zh: 假如 |jiǎ rú|if / 你 |nǐ|your / 的 |de / 成绩 |chéng jì|grades / 再 |zài|a little / 好 |hǎo|higher / 一点儿 |yì diǎnr / , 就 |jiù|then / 能 |néng|could / 申请 |shēn qǐng|apply to / 北大 |Běi Dà|Peking University / 了 |le / 。 }

If your grades were a bit higher, you could apply to Peking University.

Remember: 假如 = the formal 如果 (假 = "suppose") —same "if," dressier register, same 就 in the result. Slots into the if-family: 如果 / 要是 (everyday) 假如 (formal).

Watch out

- Like the others, it pairs with 就—假如…就….

15.2 万一……怎么办? —"what if (the worst)"

万一 (literally "ten-thousand to one") raises an **unlikely but worrying** possibility —"what if ..., in case ..., on the off chance." It's usually for undesirable scenarios, as a question (怎么办 / 呢) or a statement.

Structure: 万一 + Bad Possibility + 怎么办? · 万一 + ..., ……

{zh: 带 |dài|take / 把 |bǎ / 伞 |sǎn|an umbrella / 吧 |ba / , 万一 |wàn yī|what if / 下雨 |xià yǔ|it rains / 呢 |ne / ? }

Take an umbrella —what if it rains?

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 要 |yào|will / 记 |jì|write it / 下来 |xià lái|down / , 万一 |wàn yī|in case / 忘 |wàng|I forget / 了 |le / 可以 |kě yǐ|I can / 查 |chá|look it up / 。 }

I'll write it down —in case I forget, I can look it up.

Remember: 万一 = "one-in-ten-thousand" = a low-odds, high-stakes "what if ...?" —the worried, better-safe scenario. The set phrase 以防万一 = "(just) in case."

Watch out

- It flags a *small chance of big trouble* —for an even-odds "if," use 如果.

15.3 Topic + 的话, Comment —marking "if"

Tag 的话 onto a clause to softly mark it as a **condition** —"if ..., (then) ...". It's a relaxed, spoken "if," often paired with 如果 / 要是 at the front.

Structure: (如果 +) Condition + 的话, ……

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 想 |xiǎng|want / 去 |qù|to go / 的话 |de huà|if / , 我 |wǒ|I / 陪 |péi|will go with / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

If you want to go, I'll come with you.

{zh: 不 |bù|not / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|like it / 的话 |de huà|if / 就 |jiù|then / 别 |bié|don't / 买 |mǎi|buy it / 。 }

If you don't like it, don't buy it.

Remember: 的话 = a soft, spoken "if," tagged on the **END** of the condition (你想去的话…). Think of it as a closing bracket on the "if" —droppable, and often paired with a front 如果 / 要是.

Watch out

- It marks the *condition* clause's tail —it doesn't go on the result.

16 Adverbs with Adjectives

16.1 格外 + 形容词 / 动词—”especially, exceptionally”

格外 pushes a quality beyond the usual —”especially, exceptionally, particularly.” It’s a touch more literary than 特别, marking something that **stands out from the norm**.

Structure: 格外 + Adjective / Verb

{zh: 雨后 |yǔ hòu|after the rain / 的 |de / 空气 |kōng qì|the air / 格外 |gé wài|exceptionally / 新鲜 |xīn xiān|fresh / 。 }

The air after rain is exceptionally fresh.

{zh: 见到 |jiàn dào|seeing / 老朋友 |lǎo péng you|her old friend / , 她 |tā|she / 格外 |gé wài|especially / 高兴 |gāo xìng|happy / 。 }

Seeing her old friend, she was especially happy.

Remember: 格外 = ”outside the usual grid” (格 = a frame/square) → ”exceptionally, beyond the norm.” It’s the more literary, stands-out cousin of 特别.

Watch out

- It implies a *departure from normal* —for plain ”very,” 很 / 非常 fit; for ”stands out,” 格外.

17 Cause/Effect Statements

17.1 之所以……，是因为……—stating the effect before the cause

之所以…是因为… states the **result first**, then explains it —”the reason (why) …is that ….” It flips the usual 因为…所以…to spotlight the outcome. The second half can also be 是为了 (purpose) or 是想 (intention).

Structure: 之所以 + Result , 是因为 / 是为了 / 是想 + Cause

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 之所以 |zhī suǒ yǐ|the reason why / 成功 |chéng gōng|succeeded / , 是因为 |shì yīn wèi|is because / 很 |hěn|very / 努力 |nǔ lì|hard-working / 。 }

The reason he succeeded is that he worked very hard.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 之所以 |zhī suǒ yǐ|the reason / 告诉 |gào su|am telling / 你 |nǐ|you / , 是想 |shì xiǎng|is to / 让 |ràng|make / 你 |nǐ|you / 小心 |xiǎo xīn|careful / 。 }

The reason I'm telling you is to make you careful.

Remember: 之所以…是因为…= 因为…所以…run backwards —outcome up front (“the reason X…”), cause behind (“…is that Y”). Use it to put the *result* in the spotlight. Tail variants: 是为了 (purpose), 是想 (intention).

Watch out

- Keep the order: 之所以 + result, then 是因为 + cause —don't put the cause first.

18 Complements

18.1 形容词 + 得 + 很 / 不得了 / 要命 / 不行—advanced degree complements

After **Adj + 得**, a fixed phrase like **很 / 不得了 / 要命 / 不行** cranks the quality to an extreme — “...terribly, ...like crazy.” (You already know -死了 and -极了; these are the other common ones.)

Structure: Adjective + 得 + 很 / 不得了 / 要命 / 不行

{zh: 这个 |zhè ge|this / 孩子 |hái zi|child / 自私 |zì sī|selfish / 得很 |de hěn|terribly / 。 }

This child is terribly selfish.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 爸爸 |bà ba|father / 固执 |gù zhí|stubborn / 得 |de / 不得了 |bù dé liǎo|awfully / 。 }

My father is awfully stubborn.

Remember: a kit of “...like crazy” tails after **Adj + 得**: 得很, 得不得了, 得要命, 得不行 (all “...to death / unbearably”). They sit alongside the -死了 / -极了 you already know.

Watch out

- These all need the 得 (自私**得**很); the -死了 / -极了 forms attach bare.

18.2 动词 + 得了 / 不了—advanced potential complements

得了 / 不了 (here 了 reads **liǎo**) after a verb asks whether the action **can be managed or pulled off** —often hinting at an outside factor. 不了 “can’t (because of circumstances).”

Structure: Verb + 得了 / 不了

{zh: 这么 |zhè me|so / 多 |duō|much / 菜 |cài|food / , 我 |wǒ|I / 吃 |chī|eat / 不了 |bù liǎo|can’t manage / 。 }

So much food —I can’t finish it all.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 那么 |nà me|so / 老 |lǎo|old / , 走 |zǒu|walk / 得了 |de liǎo|can manage / 那么 |nà me|that / 多 |duō|far / 路 |lù / 吗 |ma / ? }

He’s so old —can he walk that far?

Remember: 了 here = **liǎo** (“manage / finish”) —V 得了 / V 不了 = “can / can’t pull it off,” usually due to circumstances (吃不了 “can’t finish,” 去不了 “can’t make it”). Different from 不能 (“not allowed”).

Watch out

- Mind the reading: 了 = *liǎo* here, not the *le* of completion.

18.3 动词 + 住 / 开 / 出 (来) —advanced result complements

Three handy result complements: **住** = hold firm / come to a halt (记住, 停住); **开** = apart / away, or relief from a worry (走开, 想开”let it go”); **出 (来)** = come into being / figure out (想出来, 看出来).

Structure: Verb + 住 / 开 / 出 (来)

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 记 |jì|remember / 不 |bù|can't / 住 |zhù|hold / 这么 |zhè me|so / 多 |duō|many / 生词 |shēng cí|new words / 。 }

I can't retain so many new words.

{zh: 想 |xiǎng|let / 开 |kāi|it go / 一点 |yì diǎn|a bit / , 别 |bié|don't / 难过 |nán guò|be sad / 了 |le / 。 }

Try to let it go —don't be sad.

Remember: picture each complement: **住** = grip/stop (记住”hold in memory,” 停住”halt”); **开** = part/away (走开”go away,” 想开”open up the knot = get over it”); **出 (来)** = bring forth (想出来”think up,” 看出来”make out”).

Watch out

- 想开 (”let it go”) vs 想出来 (”think up”) —same 想, opposite results from the complement.

18.4 动词 + 坏了—”…terribly, …to bits”

The complement **坏了** (like 死了) means a feeling has hit an **overwhelming** pitch —”…terribly, …to bits.” Despite 坏 (”bad”), it just means ”extremely,” and can even be positive.

Structure: Adjective / psych-Verb + 坏了

{zh: 大家 |dà jiā|everyone / 都 |dōu / 累 |lèi|tired / 坏了 |huài le|out / 。 }

Everyone was worn out.

{zh: 孩子 |hái zi|the child / 不见 |bú jiàn|went missing / 了 |le / , 妈妈 |mā ma|the mother / 急 |jí|frantic / 坏了 |huài le / 。 }

The child went missing —the mother was frantic.

Remember: 坏了 = ”…to bits,” not ”broken” —pure intensity, even for good feelings: 累坏了 (worn out), 饿坏了 (starving), 急坏了 (frantic), 高兴坏了 (thrilled to bits).

Watch out

- Don't read 高兴坏了 as ”happiness broke” —坏了 is just ”extremely.”

18.5 动词 + 着—the result complement 着 (zháo)

着 (read **zháo**) after a verb means the action **hit its mark** —”succeeded in, managed to.” Don't confuse it with the aspect particle 着 (*zhe*). Its potential forms are 得着 / 不

着.

Structure: Verb + 着 (zháo)

{zh: 宝宝 |bǎo bao|the baby / 刚 |gāng|just / 睡着 |shuì zháo|fell asleep / 。 }

The baby just fell asleep.

{zh: 昨晚 |zuó wǎn|last night / 我 |wǒ|I / 没 |méi|didn't / 睡着 |shuì zháo|manage to sleep / 。 }

I couldn't fall asleep last night.

Remember: 着 = zháo here = "hit the target, succeeded" —睡着 (managed to sleep), 找着 (found), 买不着 (can't get hold of). A world away from the *zhe* of an ongoing state (门开着).

Watch out

- Two readings, two jobs: 睡着 (*zháo*, "fell asleep," a result) vs 开着 (*zhe*, "is open," a state).

18.6 动词 + 到—tricky uses of 到

到 after a verb makes **achievement** explicit: 找 ("look for") vs 找到 ("find"); 做 vs 做到 ("accomplish"); 买 vs 买到 ("succeed in buying"). Without 到, a verb can shade into "try to."

Structure: Verb + 到

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 一定 |yí dìng|must / 要 |yào / 找到 |zhǎo dào|find it / 。 }

You must find it.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 没 |méi|didn't / 想到 |xiǎng dào|expect / 你 |nǐ|you / 也 |yě|too / 来 |lái|came / 了 |le / 。 }

I didn't expect you'd come too.

Remember: 到 stamps "achieved" onto the verb: 找 (search) → 找到 (find), 买 → 买到 (succeed in buying), 想 → 想到 (think of / expect). A bare verb can mean just "try to."

Watch out

- 找 vs 找到 is the classic pair: 找了半天 ("searched for ages") doesn't say you 找到 ("found") it.

18.7 动词 + 来 + 动词 + 去—"...ing this way and that"

Wrap one verb in 来…去 to paint a **repeated, aimless** action —"…ing back and forth, over and over." The same single-syllable verb repeats on both sides.

Structure: Verb + 来 + (same) Verb + 去

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 在 |zài / 考场 |kǎo chǎng|the exam hall / 外面 |wài miàn|outside / 走来走去 |zǒu lái zǒu qù|paced back and forth / 。 }

He paced back and forth outside the exam hall.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 想来想去 |xiǎng lái xiǎng qù|thought it over and over / 都 |dōu|still / 想不明白 |xiǎng bù míng bai|couldn't work it out / 。 }

I thought it over and over but still couldn't work it out.

Remember: V 来 V 去 = "back and forth, round and round" —the same one-syllable verb on both sides, painting restless repetition: 走来走去 (pacing), 想来想去 (mulling), 说来说去 (going on about it), 翻来覆去 (tossing and turning).

Watch out

- It carries a faintly *futile* / *restless* tone —lots of motion, often no result.

19 Conditional Statements

19.1 一旦……，就……—“once …then …”

一旦…就… sets up a **trigger** —“once (something happens), then (consequence).” It looks ahead to a possible future turning point. Unlike 一…就… (which links two *real* events in quick succession), 一旦 frames a **hypothetical** threshold.

Structure: 一旦 + Condition , (Subject) 就 + Consequence

{zh: 有些 |yǒu xiē|some / 人 |rén|people / 一旦 |yí dàn|the moment / 有 |yǒu|they have / 了 |le / 钱 |qián|money / , 就 |jiù|then / 变 |biàn|change / 了 |le / 。 }

Some people change the moment they have money.

{zh: 一旦 |yí dàn|once / 你 |nǐ|your / 的 |de / 公司 |gōng sī|company / 上市 |shàng shì|goes public / , 你 |nǐ|you / 就 |jiù|then / 可以 |kě yǐ|can / 变成 |biàn chéng|become / 有钱人 |yǒu qián rén|rich / 。 }

Once your company goes public, you'll be rich.

Remember: 一旦 = “if/when ever X happens (then…)” —a **HYPOTHETICAL threshold**. Contrast 一…就… (HSK 4), which chains two *actual* events in instant succession (一下课就走). 一旦 looks to a maybe-future; 一…就… reports a real link.

Watch out

- 一旦 is about a *possible* future turning point —don't use it for a habitual or already-happened link (that's 一…就…).

20 Sentence Patterns

20.1 把 (advanced) —给, 当成, 当回事, 看成

Once the basic 把 sentence clicks, these advanced moves come up constantly: 把 + Obj + 给 + Verb (spoken emphasis, 给 optional); 把 + Obj + 当成 / 看作 + ... ("treat / regard as"); 不把...当回事 ("not take seriously"); and 把 A 看成 / 读成 B ("mistake A for B").

Structure: 把 + Obj + 给 + VP · 把 + Obj + 当成 / 看作 + ... · 把 A + 看成 / 读成 + B

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 把 |bǎ / 这 |zhè|this / 事儿 |shì er|matter / 给 |gěi / 忘 |wàng|forgot / 了 |le / 。 }

I clean forgot about this.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 一直 |yì zhí|have always / 把 |bǎ / 他 |tā|him / 看作 |kàn zuò|seen as / 我 |wǒ|my / 哥哥 |gē ge|older brother / 。 }

I've always seen him as an older brother.

Remember: a 把 toolkit —把...给 V (a spoken kick: 把事儿给忘了), 把...当成 / 看作... ("treat/regard as"), 不把...当回事 ("not take seriously"), 把 A 看成 / 读成 B ("mistake A for B"). All still "grab the object, then do something to it."

Watch out

- The 给 here is just emphasis —it doesn't mean "give."

20.2 Noun 1 + 不比 + Noun 2 + Adj. —"no more ...than"

不比 is **not** 没有. 没有 = "not as ...as" (definitely less); 不比 = "no more ...than" (we might even be equal). It directly negates 比.

Structure: Noun 1 + 不比 + Noun 2 + Adjective · A + 不比 + B + Verb + 得 + Adj

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 不比 |bù bǐ|no ...than / 我 |wǒ|me / 差 |chà|worse / 。 }

You're no worse than me.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 跳 |tiào|dances / 得 |de / 不比 |bù bǐ|no ...than / 明星 |míng xīng|a star / 差 |chà|worse / 。 }

She dances no worse than a star.

Remember: 不比 = "no more ...than" (maybe equal); 没有 = "not as ...as" (definitely less). 你不比我差 ("you're no worse than me," i.e. just as good). And don't muddle 不比 (bùbǐ) with 不必 (bùbì, "needn't")!

Watch out

- 不比 quietly leaves room for "equal" —it denies "more," not "the same."

20.3 要 + 动词 + 就 + 动词—“if you’re going to …, then …”

要 + V + 就 + V lays down a **resolute** condition —“if you’re going to V, then V (and do it properly / now).” The tone is almost a command, so it usually drops the subject, with single-syllable verbs.

Structure: 要 + Verb + 就 + Verb ……

{zh: 要 |yào|if you’re going to / 走 |zǒu|leave / 就 |jiù|then / 走 |zǒu|leave / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 不 |bù|don’t / 需要 |xū yào|need / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

If you’re leaving, then leave —we don’t need you.

{zh: 要 |yào|if you’re going to / 学 |xué|study it / 就 |jiù|then / 好好 |hǎo hǎo|properly / 学 |xué|study / 。 }

If you’re going to study it, study it properly.

Remember: **要 V 就 V** = “if you’re gonna do it, then **DO** it (properly)” —resolute, command-like, usually subjectless (要走就走). Don’t mix it up with the indifferent V 就 V (坏了就坏了, “so be it”) later in this file.

Watch out

- The second verb can take a short modifier: 要去就快点去, 要学就好好学.

20.4 少不了—“can’t do without”

少不了 means something is **indispensable or unavoidable** —“can’t do without, bound to involve.” It’s colloquial.

Structure: Subject + 少不了 + Noun / Verb Phrase

{zh: 每年 |měi nián|every / 春节 |Chūn jié|New Year / , 少不了 |shǎo bu liǎo|you can’t do without / 饺子 |jiǎo zi|dumplings / 。 }

New Year just isn’t New Year without dumplings.

{zh: 回家 |huí jiā|getting home / 晚 |wǎn|late / 了 |le / , 少不了 |shǎo bu liǎo|there’s no escaping / 一顿 |yí dùn|a / 骂 |mà|telling-off / 。 }

Get home late and a telling-off is guaranteed.

Remember: **少不了** = “can’t be short of it” = **indispensable / inescapable** — the good kind (过年少不了饺子) or the bad (少不了—顿骂, “a telling-off is guaranteed”).

Watch out

- 了 is *liǎo* here —少不了 (“can’t do without”), not 少不了 with a *le*.

20.5 A , 等于 B —“amounts to, is the same as”

等于 equates two things —“equals, amounts to, is the same as.” Beyond maths, it draws an “as good as” equivalence, often an **unintended** one.

Structure: A , (就) 等于 B

{zh: 浪费 |làng fèi|wasting / 时间 |shí jiān|time / 等于 |děng yú|is / 浪费 |làng fèi|wasting / 生命 |shēng mìng|life / 。 }

Wasting time is wasting life.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 告诉 |gào su|tell / 小王 |Xiǎo Wáng|Xiao Wang / 就 |jiù / 等于 |děng yú|is as good as / 告诉 |gào su|telling / 了 |le / 大家 |dà jiā|everyone / 。 }

Telling Xiao Wang is as good as telling everyone.

Remember: 等于 = ”= / as good as” —straight from maths (3+2 等于 5) into ”amounts to the same thing” (告诉小王就等于告诉大家). Often a consequence you didn’t intend.

Watch out

- It draws an *equivalence*, not a cause —”X 等于 Y” says they amount to the same, not ”X causes Y.”

20.6 从 + 名词 + 中—”from (a source), …(gained)”

从…中 marks the **source** from which knowledge or experience is drawn —”from (within) …, (I gained) ….” It differs from 从…到 (which spans time or place).

Structure: 从 + Source + 中 + Result

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 从 |cóng|from / 书 |shū|books / 中 |zhōng / 学 |xué|learned / 到 |dào / 了 |le / 很多 |hěn duō|a lot / 。 }

I learned a lot from books.

{zh: 从 |cóng|from / 这件 |zhè jiàn|this / 事 |shì|matter / 中 |zhōng / , 他 |tā|he / 明白 |míng bai|saw / 了 |le / 诚实 |chéng shí|honesty’s / 的 |de / 重要 |zhòng yào|importance / 。 }

From this, he saw the importance of honesty.

Remember: 从…中 = ”from WITHIN (this source), I drew…” —the well you take insight or information out of (从书中学到, 从这件事中明白). Different from 从…到 (a span from A to B).

Watch out

- The 中 closes the bracket —从…中, not a bare 从….

20.7 无 + 名词 + 可 + 动词—”no …to …”

The formal frame 无 + Noun + 可 + Verb means there’s **nothing of that kind to do** —”no …to …, nothing to be ….” It’s a condensed, classical-flavoured 没有…可以….

Structure: 无 + Noun + 可 + Verb

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 和 |hé|with / 他 |tā|him / 无话可说 |wú huà kě shuō|have nothing to say / 。 }

I have nothing to say to him.

{zh: 公司 |gōng sī|the firm / 倒闭 |dǎo bì|folded / 了 |le / , 他 |tā|he / 无路可走 |wú lù kě zǒu|has nowhere to turn / 。 }

The firm folded —he's nowhere to turn.

Remember: 无 N 可 V = "no N to V" (无 = literary 没有). Learn the set four-character forms whole: 无话可说 (nothing to say), 无路可走 (nowhere to turn), 无处可去 (nowhere to go), 无事可做 (nothing to do).

Watch out

- Formal/literary —in speech you'd say 没有…可以….

20.8 不但…, 甚至连…也…—"not only …, even …"

This frame escalates: 不但 A, 甚至连 B 也…—"not only A; even B (the extreme case) too."

Structure: Subject + 不但…., 甚至连 + New Item + 也 + Matching Situation

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 不但 |bú dàn|not only / 不 |bù|doesn't / 知道 |zhī dào|know / 李连杰 |Lǐ Lián jié|Jet Li / , 甚至连 |shèn zhì lián|even / 成龙 |Chéng Lóng|Jackie Chan / 也 |yě / 不 |bù|doesn't / 知道 |zhī dào|know / 。 }

He doesn't know Jet Li —he doesn't even know Jackie Chan.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|your / 男朋友 |nán péng you|boyfriend / 不但 |bú dàn|not only / 做好 |zuò hǎo|planned / 了 |le / 攻略 |gōng lüè|the trip / , 甚至连 |shèn zhì lián|even / 机票 |jī piào|the tickets / 也 |yě / 买好 |mǎi hǎo|bought / 了 |le / 。 }

He not only planned the trip —he even bought the tickets.

Remember: 不但 A, 甚至连 B 也…= "not only A —even B!" It tops off 不但…而且 by reaching for the most striking case (甚至连…也, pulling in the 连…也 "even" frame).

Watch out

- B should be the *more surprising* item —the escalation is the whole point.

20.9 (跟 / 和 / 与) …有关的 + 名词—"…related to …"

跟 / 和 / 与…有关的 builds a modifier meaning "(that is) related to …" 跟 / 和 are casual (spoken); 与 is formal.

Structure: 跟 / 和 / 与 + Topic + 有关的 + Noun

{zh: 跟 |gēn|to do / 他 |tā|him / 有关的 |yǒu guān de|related / 事情 |shì qing|anything / , 我 |wǒ|I / 都 |dōu / 不 |bù|don't / 想 |xiǎng|want to / 知道 |zhī dào|know / 。 }

Anything to do with him, I don't want to know.

{zh: 与 |yǔ|related to / 疫苗 |yì miáo|the vaccine / 有关的 |yǒu guān de / 研究 |yán jiū|research / 已经 |yǐ jīng|already / 开始 |kāi shǐ|begun / 了 |le / 。 }

Research related to the vaccine has already begun.

Remember: …有关的 + noun = "the noun (that's) connected to …." The 的 clips the whole "related to X" phrase onto the noun. Register: 跟 / 和 (spoken) vs 与 (formal).

Watch out

- Keep the 的—it's what turns "related to X" into a modifier of the noun.

20.10 所谓 + (的) Noun Phrase —"so-called"

所谓 flags a term as "so-called" —putting it in mental scare-quotes. It's often sceptical, but (unlike English) not always negative. The 的 is optional.

Structure: 所谓 + (的) + Noun Phrase

{zh: 没有 |méi yǒu|there's no / 所谓 |suǒ wèi|so-called / 的 |de / 失败 |shī bài|failure / , 除非 |chú fēi|unless / 你 |nǐ|you / 不 |bù|don't / 再 |zài / 尝试 |cháng shì|try again / 。 }

There's no such thing as "failure," unless you stop trying.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 就是 |jiù shì|is / 你 |nǐ|your / 所谓 |suǒ wèi|so-called / 的 |de / 帮忙 |bāng máng|"help" / ? }

Is this your so-called help?

Remember: 所谓 = "so-called" (= air-quotes) —names a term while holding it at arm's length (你所谓的帮忙? "your so-called help?"). Often sceptical, not always damning; the 的 is optional.

Watch out

- It questions the label, not necessarily the thing —context sets how sceptical it sounds.

20.11 在 + Time + 内—"within (a period)"

在…内 sets a **time limit** —"within (a period)." It's a sandwich frame; the period can be precise or vague.

Structure: 在 + Time + 内

{zh: 在 |zài|in / 短短 |duǎn duǎn|just / 两年 |liǎng nián|two years / 内 |nèi / , 他 |tā|he / 就 |jiù / 当上 |dāng shàng|became / 了 |le / CEO / 。 }

In just two years, he became CEO.

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 在 |zài|within / 三天 |sān tiān|three days / 内 |nèi / 回复 |huí fù|reply / 。 }

Please reply within three days.

Remember: 在 + time + 内 = a sandwich for "within" (在三天内 = "inside three days"). The period can be exact (两年内) or loose (短时间内). Cousin of 以内 (HSK 5, file 07).

Watch out

- It brackets a *duration*, not a deadline point —"within three days," not "by Friday."

20.12 宁可…，也不 / 也要…—“would rather”

宁可 states a **deliberate, costly choice**. 宁可 A 也不 B = “would rather A than B” (A is the lesser evil); 宁可 A 也要 B = “would rather A in order to still get B” (accept a cost for B).

Structure: 宁可 + A , 也不 + B · 宁可 + A , 也要 + B

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 宁可 |nìng kě|would rather / 早到 |zǎo dào|arrive early / , 也不 |yě bù|than / 迟到 |chí dào|be late / 。 }

We'd rather arrive early than late.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 宁可 |nìng kě|would rather / 熬夜 |áo yè|stay up all night / , 也要 |yě yào|just to / 做完 |zuò wán|finish it / 。 }

I'd rather stay up all night just to finish it.

Remember: 宁可 A 也不 B = “rather A than B” (B is the thing avoided); 宁可 A 也要 B = “rather A, just to still get B” (B is the thing wanted, at A's cost). The 也不 / 也要 flips which side is the goal.

Watch out

- 也不 rejects B; 也要 insists on B —opposite meanings hanging on one character.

20.13 动词 + 就 + 动词—expressing indifference

Repeat a verb around 就 to shrug a matter off —“(if it …,) then so be it; fine, …then.” It carries an “I don't care” attitude.

Structure: Verb + 就 + (same) Verb

{zh: 坏 |huài|broken / 了 |le / 就 |jiù|then / 坏 |huài|broken / 了 |le / , 再 |zài|just / 买 |mǎi|buy / 新的 |xīn de|a new one / 。 }

If it's broken, it's broken —we'll just buy a new one.

{zh: 走 |zǒu|leave / 就 |jiù|then / 走 |zǒu|leave / , 我 |wǒ|I / 早就 |zǎo jiù|long ago / 不 |bù|didn't / 想 |xiǎng|want to / 干 |gàn|do it / 了 |le / ! }

Leave then —I've long wanted to quit anyway!

Remember: V 就 V = a shrug, “so be it.” 坏了就坏了 (“if it's broken, it's broken —whatever”). Don't confuse it with 要 V 就 V (“if you're going to V, then *really* V”) —that one's resolute, this one's indifferent.

Watch out

- Same verb both sides, with a “couldn't care less” tone —走就走, 丢就丢.

20.14 Action , 好 + Purpose —“so that, in order to”

A clause-medial 好 introduces the **purpose** of the preceding action —“so that, so as to.”

Structure: Action , 好 + Purpose

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 说 |shuō|speak / 慢 |màn|slowly / 点儿 |diǎnr|a bit / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 好 |hǎo|so that / 做 |zuò|take / 笔记 |bǐ jì|notes / 。 }

Please speak a little slower, so we can take notes.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 睡前 |shuì qián|before bed / 喝 |hē|drinks / 牛奶 |niú nǎi|milk / , 好 |hǎo|so as to / 入睡 |rù shuì|fall asleep / 。 }

She drinks milk before bed to help her fall asleep.

Remember: this 好 = "so that / so as to," not "good." It links an action to its purpose: 说慢点, 好做笔记 ("speak slowly, so that we can take notes"). Think "do this, the better to...".

Watch out

- Mid-clause 好 + a verb = purpose; don't read it as the adjective "good" there.

20.15 一面…，一面…——”(doing one thing) while (another)”

一面…一面… describes **two simultaneous actions** —"while …, (at the same time) …". It's a formal cousin of 一边…一边….

Structure: 一面 + Verb 1 , 一面 + Verb 2

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|likes to / 一面 |yí miàn|while / 吃东西 |chī dōng xi|eating / , 一面 |yí miàn|at the same time / 看 |kàn|watch / 电影 |diàn yǐng|films / 。 }

He likes to eat while watching films.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 一面 |yí miàn|while / 哭 |kū|crying / 一面 |yí miàn|at the same time / 跑 |pǎo|ran off / 。 }

I ran off crying.

Remember: 一面…一面… = the formal 一边…一边… ("doing two things at once"). 面 = "side," same image as 边—one action on each side, simultaneously.

Watch out

- Reserve it for writing/formal speech; 一边…一边… is the everyday version.

20.16 不是…，就是…——”either …or …”

不是 A, 就是 B says it must be **one of two** —"(it's) either A or B." A and B can be verbs, adjectives, or nouns; it rules out any third option.

Structure: 不是 + A , 就是 + B

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 整天 |zhěng tiān|all day / 不是 |bú shì|either / 打游戏 |dǎ yóu xì|games / 就是 |jiù shì|or / 睡觉 |shuì jiào|sleeping / 。 }

All day it's either gaming or sleeping.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 买 |mǎi|buy / 的 |de / 衣服 |yī fu|clothes / 不是 |bú shì|either / 大 |dà|too big / 就是 |jiù shì|or / 小 |xiǎo|too small / 。 }

The clothes I buy are either too big or too small.

Remember: 不是 A 就是 B = "it's either A or B (no third option)" —often a bit exasperated (不是…就是…, "always one or the other"). Don't confuse it with 不是 A 而是 B ("not A but rather B"), which *corrects* to B.

Watch out

- 不是…就是…narrows to two; 不是…而是…replaces a wrong A with the right B — the second word (就是 vs 而是) tells them apart.

21 Complex Sentence Patterns

21.1 怪不得 / 难怪—“no wonder”

怪不得 (and its twin **难怪**) expresses a **dawning realisation** —“no wonder, that’s why.” Some fresh piece of information has just made everything click. The two are interchangeable.

Structure: Reason , 怪不得 / 难怪 + Observation

{zh: 小张 |Xiǎo Zhāng|Xiao Zhang / 请假 |qǐng jià|on leave / 了 |le / , 怪不得 |guài bu de|no wonder / 今天 |jīn tiān|today / 没 |méi|haven’t / 看到 |kàn dào|seen / 他 |tā|him / 。 }

Xiao Zhang’s on leave —no wonder I haven’t seen him today.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 也 |yě / 难怪 |nán guài|isn’t to blame / 他 |tā|him / , 他 |tā|he / 这么 |zhè me|so / 小 |xiǎo|young / 。 }

You can’t really blame him —he’s so young.

Remember: **怪不得 = 难怪 = “no wonder!”** —read 怪不得 literally as “*can’t blame* it (given that…),” which is exactly why 难怪 + a person also means “can’t really blame them” (这也难怪他, “you can hardly blame him”).

Watch out

- Both pair with the explaining fact —the reason comes first, then 怪不得 + what’s now explained.

22 Either...or

22.1 或者……，或者……—“either ...or ...”

Doubling 或者 lays out **two options** in a statement —“either ..., or ...” The options are usually verb phrases. (In a *question*, you’d switch to 还是.)

Structure: 或者 + A , 或者 + B

{zh: 只有 |zhǐ yǒu|there’s only / 一块 |yí kuài|one piece of / 蛋糕 |dàn gāo|cake / , 或者 |huò zhě|either / 你 |nǐ|you / 吃 |chī|eat it / 或者 |huò zhě|or / 我 |wǒ|I / 吃 |chī|eat it / 。 }

There’s only one piece of cake —either you eat it or I do.

{zh: 咱们 |zán men|let’s / 或者 |huò zhě|either / 今天 |jīn tiān|today / 去 |qù|go / 或者 |huò zhě|or / 明天 |míng tiān|tomorrow / 去 |qù|go / , 一定 |yí dìng|definitely / 要 |yào|must / 去 |qù|go / 。 }

Let’s go either today or tomorrow —but we definitely must go.

Remember: 或者…或者…= “either ...or ...” in a **STATEMENT** (laying out options); a *choice question* still takes 还是. Same statement-vs-question split as the basic 或者 / 还是 pair (HSK 3).

Watch out

- Don’t slip into 还是 here —these are stated options, not a question being asked.

23 Let alone

23.1 别说……，就是 / 连……也……—”let alone, never mind”

别说 A，就是 / 连 B 也… waves away the **bigger** case to stress that even the **smaller** one fails —”forget about A; even B ….” Note the order is the **reverse** of the 更不用说 pattern.

Structure: 别说 + A ， 就是 / 连 + B + 也 / 都 + Verb

{zh: 别说 |bié shuō|forget / 一百 |yì bǎi|a hundred / ， 就是 |jiù shì|even / 一块 |yí kuài|one / 钱 |qián|kuai / 我 |wǒ|I / 也 |yě / 不 |bù|won't / 给 |gěi|give / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

Forget a hundred —I won't even give you one kuai.

{zh: 别说 |bié shuō|never mind / 白酒 |bái jiǔ|baijiu / ， 连 |lián|even / 啤酒 |pí jiǔ|beer / 我 |wǒ|I / 都 |dōu / 受不了 |shòu bu liǎo|can't stand / 。 }

Never mind baijiu —I can't even stand beer.

Remember: 别说 = ”forget the big thing —even the small one fails.” Dismiss the *bigger* case A first (别说一百), then show even the *smaller* B doesn't hold (连一块也不给). Big → small. The exact reverse of 更不用说 (next).

Watch out

- Order matters: the *easier/smaller* case is what actually fails, proving the point about the bigger one.

23.2 ……，更不用说……—”let alone, much less”

连 A 都…，更不用说 B 了 runs from the **smaller** case up to the **greater** —”even A …, let alone B.” A (the lesser) comes first; B (the more extreme) is capped with 了.

Structure: 连 + A + 都 / 也 + Verb ， 更不用说 + B + 了

{zh: 连 |lián|even / 我 |wǒ|I / 都 |dōu / 不 |bù|don't / 知道 |zhī dào|know / 这个 |zhè ge|this / 歌手 |gē shǒu|singer / ， 更不用说 |gèng bú yòng shuō|let alone / 他 |tā|him / 了 |le / 。 }

Even I don't know this singer, let alone him.

{zh: 连 |lián|even / 家人 |jiā rén|family / 都 |dōu / 不 |bù|don't / 理解 |lǐ jiě|understand / 你 |nǐ|you / ， 更不用说 |gèng bú yòng shuō|let alone / 别人 |bié rén|others / 了 |le / 。 }

Even your family don't understand you, let alone other people.

Remember: 更不用说 = ”even A…, LET ALONE B.” Lesser case A first (连我都不知道), greater B capped with 了 (更不用说他了). Small → big —the **opposite** order to 别说 (big → small). Both make the same point from different ends.

Watch out

- Pair it with a leading 连 A 都…—the "even the small case" half sets up the "let alone" punch.

24 Comparing similar adverbs

24.1 常常 vs 经常—“often”

Both mean “often” and overlap heavily as **adverbs**. The split is about word-class: **经常** can *also* be an **adjective** (“regular”: 经常的事), and its negative is clean (不经常). **常常** is purely an adverb, and 不常常 grates—use 不常 instead.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 常常 |cháng cháng|often / 收到 |shōu dào|get / 垃圾 |lā jī|spam / 短信 |duǎn xìn|texts / 。 }

I often get spam texts.

{zh: 她 |tā|her / 忘 |wàng|forgetting / 带 |dài|to bring / 钥匙 |yào shi|her keys / 是 |shì|is / 经常 |jīng cháng|a regular / 的 |de / 事 |shì|thing / 。 }

Forgetting her keys is a regular thing for her.

Remember: as adverbs, twins; only **经常** also works as an **ADJECTIVE** (经常的事, “a regular occurrence”). And negate with 不常 / 不经常—never the clunky 不常常.

Watch out

- If it modifies a *noun* (经常的事), only 经常 fits.

25 Comparing similar auxiliary words

25.1 总算 vs 终于—“finally, at last”

Both mean “finally,” but the feeling differs. **总算** is **informal** and breathes **relief**—things finally worked out *acceptably*, often after worry or impatience. **终于** is more **neutral and objective**, for any long-awaited result (good *or* bad). 总算 rarely goes before the subject.

{zh: 等 |děng|waited / 了 |le / 很久 |hěn jiǔ|a long time / , 他 |tā|he / 总算 |zǒng suàn|at last (relief) / 来 |lái|came / 了 |le / 。 }

After waiting ages, he's finally here.

{zh: 经过 |jīng guò|after / 多年 |duō nián|years of / 努力 |nǔ lì|effort / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 终于 |zhōng yú|finally / 成功 |chéng gōng|succeeded / 了 |le / 。 }

After years of effort, we finally succeeded.

Remember: 总算 = “finally, *phew*” (informal relief); 终于 = neutral “at last.” A *bad* ending takes 终于, never 总算: 终于失败了 (“failed in the end”), but 总算失败了 —there’s no relief in failing.

Watch out

- Reach for 总算 only when the outcome is a *welcome* one you’d worried about.

26 Comparing similar conjunctions

26.1 跟 vs 对—”with” vs ”to / towards”

With 说, both work (我跟她说 / 我对她说). But they part ways elsewhere. 跟 also means ”and / with” —it *joins or compares* two things (跟…一样, 跟…一起). 对 marks the **one-way target** of an attitude or action (对…笑, 对…好), and it **can’t** join two nouns.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 跟 |gēn|like / 你们 |nǐ men|you all / 不 |bù|not / 一样 |yí yàng|the same / , 我 |wǒ|I / 还有 |hái yǒu|still have / 孩子 |hái zi|kids / 呢 |ne / 。 }

I’m not like you —I’ve still got kids.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 要 |yào|going to / 跟 |gēn|with / 我 |wǒ|me / 一起 |yì qǐ|together / 去 |qù|go / 吗 |ma / ? }

Are you coming with me?

Remember: 跟 JOINS (two-way): ”and / with / same as” (跟…一样, 跟…一起); 对 AIMS (one-way): ”to / towards” (对他笑, 对我好). Picture 跟 as a link between equals, 对 as an arrow at a target.

Watch out

- 对 can’t join two nouns —”A and B” is 跟 / 和, never 对.

27 Comparing similar prepositions

27.1 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 向一朝 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.

27.2 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 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 —对于他笑 , 对他笑 .

27.3 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.

27.4 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 → 给; you feel/act *on behalf of* someone → 为.

Watch out

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

28 Comparing similar time words

28.1 平时 vs 平常—“usually, ordinarily”

Both mean “usually / ordinarily” and are interchangeable as **adverbs**. The split: 平常 can *also* be an **adjective** meaning “ordinary, common” (很平常); 平时 can't.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 平时 |píng shí|normally / 很少 |hěn shǎo|rarely / 喝酒 |hē jiǔ|drinks / 。 }

He rarely drinks normally.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 是 |shì|is / 很 |hěn|very / 平常 |píng cháng|ordinary / 的 |de / 事 |shì|thing / 。 }

This is a perfectly ordinary thing.

Remember: as adverbs, twins (“usually”); only 平常 doubles as an **ADJECTIVE** (“ordinary”: 很平常的事). 平时 stays an adverb—it can't describe a noun.

Watch out

- For “an ordinary X,” only 平常 works (很平常的事), never 很平时的事.

28.2 以后 vs 之后—“after, afterwards”

Both mean “after.” 以后 can stand **alone** meaning “in the future / from now on,” and follows a time or event. 之后 is a touch more **formal** / **written** and usually needs a preceding reference point. After a bare verb-event both work.

{zh: 毕业 |bì yè|graduating / 以后 |yǐ hòu|after / , 我 |wǒ|I / 想 |xiǎng|want / 去 |qù|to go / 国外 |guó wài|abroad / 。 }

After graduating, I want to go abroad.

{zh: 以后 |yǐ hòu|in future / 小心 |xiǎo xīn|careful / 点 |diǎn / 。 }

Be more careful in future.

Remember: 以后 can stand **ALONE** = “from now on / in future” (以后小心点); 之后 leans formal and needs a reference point in front of it. After a verb-event (毕业以后 / 毕业之后) both work; only 以后 floats free.

Watch out

- You can't replace the standalone 以后 (“in future”) with 之后—之后小心点 sounds incomplete.

29 Comparing similar verbs

29.1 看起来 vs 看来—“it looks / it seems”

看起来 = “looks (like)” from **appearance or observation** (the sky, a face, a dish).

看来 = “it seems / apparently,” a **judgement or inference** the speaker draws, often sentence-initial.

{zh: 看起来 |kàn qǐ lái|it looks like / 要 |yào|about to / 下雨 |xià yǔ|rain / 了 |le / 。 }

It looks like rain.

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

It seems he's not coming.

Remember: **看起来** = what your **EYES** report (the sky looks like rain); **看来** = what your **MIND** concludes (“it seems…he’s not coming”). Appearance vs inference —起来 is the “to the senses” tag; 看来 is “as I see it, …”.

Watch out

- A visible look → 看起来; a reasoned conclusion → 看来. They aren't freely swappable.

29.2 显得 vs 看起来—“appear” vs “look”

Both touch on appearance. **看起来** simply reports how something **looks**. **显得** says something **comes across / appears (more)** …—usually implying a comparison or the impression it gives off, often with 更.

{zh: 穿 |chuān|wearing / 上 |shàng / 这件 |zhè jiàn|this / 衣服 |yī fu|outfit / , 她 |tā|she / 显得 |xiǎn de|comes across as / 更 |gèng|more / 年轻 |nián qīng|young / 了 |le / 。 }

In this outfit she comes across as younger.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 看起来 |kàn qǐ lái|looks / 很 |hěn|very / 累 |lèi|tired / 。 }

He looks tired.

Remember: **看起来** = plain “looks…”; **显得** = “comes **ACROSS** as (more)…” —an impression actively *given off*, usually by contrast and often with 更 (这件衣服显得更年轻, “makes her look younger”). 显 = “show / reveal.”

Watch out

- 显得 implies *something creates* the impression (the outfit, the lighting); 看起来 is a neutral observation.