

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 |zěnmē|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 — 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 lǜ|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 |zuì 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 |zuì 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 / 时 |shí|when / , 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 |bú 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

- 吃完了 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. In standard usage 以上 / 以下 / 以内 are **inclusive** of the boundary number 含本数 (十岁以下 = ten and under, 10 included); only 以外 (and 不满 / 超过) excludes it.

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 以上 / 以下 / 以内 **include** the boundary number (十岁以下 = *ten and under*); only 以外 excludes it. 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 he 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 |nǔ 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 |zěnmeyàng|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 (少不了一顿骂, “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 — 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 $\implies$ 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.