

Comparing similar adverbs

Ref Hsk6 Grammar

按照 vs. 根据 — “in accordance with” vs. “on the basis of”

Both mean “according to,” but they look at different things. **按照** means following a **rule, plan, order or standard** to the letter — “in accordance with.” **根据** means drawing on **evidence, grounds or a source** — “on the basis of, going by”; it can also be a noun (有根据 = “well-grounded”), which **按照** cannot.

Structure: 按照 + rule / plan + Action · 根据 + evidence / source + Conclusion

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 按照 |àn zhào|in accordance with / 规定 |guī dìng|the rules / 排队 |pái duì|queue up / 。 }

Please queue up in accordance with the rules.

{zh: 根据 |gēn jù|going by / 天气 |tiān qì|the weather / 预报 |yù bào|forecast / , 明天 |míng tiān|tomorrow / 会 |huì|will / 下雨 |xià yǔ|rain / 。 }

Going by the forecast, it'll rain tomorrow.

Remember: **按照** = follow a **RULE/plan** (“by the book”); **根据** = **reason from EVIDENCE** (“going by the data”). 按照规定 (per the rules) vs 根据预报 (per the forecast). Only 根据 doubles as a noun (毫无根据, “groundless”).

Watch out

- A rule to obey → 按照; grounds to infer from → 根据.

不得不 vs. 只好 — “have no choice” vs. “have no better choice”

Both say you’re forced into something unwanted, but the squeeze differs. **不得不** = there is **no other** choice at all — you simply can’t avoid it (stronger, like 不得已). **只好** = there is **no better** choice — you settle for the least-bad option. Also, **不得不** must be followed by a positive verb; **只好** can take 不 / 没.

Structure: 不得不 + positive Verb · 只好 + Verb (可带不 / 没)

{zh: 出门 |chū mén|going out / 没 |méi|without / 带 |dài|bringing / 钱 |qián|money / , 不得不 |bù dé bù|I had no choice but to / 向 |xiàng|from / 朋友 |péng you|a friend

/ 借 |jiè|borrow / 。 }

I went out without money, so I had no choice but to borrow from a friend.

{zh: 外面 |wài mian|outside / 下 |xià|it’s / 大雨 |dà yǔ|pouring / 了 |le / , 我 |wǒ|I / 只好 |zhǐ hǎo|had no better option than to / 不 |bù|not / 出去 |chū qù|go out / 了 |le / 。 }

It’s pouring outside, so I’ll just not go out.

Remember: **不得不** = **NO OTHER choice (forced, no escape)**; **只好** = **NO BETTER choice (settle for least-bad)**. And the grammar tell: 不得不 takes only a *positive* verb, while 只好 can take 不 / 没 (只好不去).

Watch out

- You can’t say 不得不不去 — for “had to *not* do,” use 只好不去.

不断 vs. 不停 — “unceasingly” vs. “without stopping”

Both describe something that keeps going. **不断** = “continually, again and again” — a process that repeats or grows over time (it can imply increase), and as an adverb it often takes **地**. **不停** = “without a pause” — the action literally never stops for a moment, often as **V + 个不停** or **不停地 + V**.

Structure: 不断 (地) + Verb · 不停地 + Verb / Verb + 个不停

{zh: 科技 |kē jì|technology / 在 |zài|is / 不断 |bú duàn|continually / 地 |de / 进步 |jìn bù|advancing / 。 }

Technology is continually advancing.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 激动 |jī dòng|was so excited / 得 |de|that she / 说 |shuō|talked / 个不停 |gè bù tíng|without stopping / 。 }

She was so excited she talked non-stop.

Remember: **不断** = “again and again / growing over time” (**断** = “break,” so **不断** = “unbroken, recurring”); **不停** = “no pause at all” (**停** = “stop”). 不断进步 (keeps advancing) vs 说个不停 (talks non-stop). 个不停 clips onto the verb: 笑个不停.

Watch out

- 不断 allows gaps that keep recurring; 不停 means *literally* no pause.

反而 vs. 却 — “on the contrary” vs. “but, yet”

Both mark a turn, but with different force. **反而** = “on the contrary, instead” — the result is the **opposite** of what you’d expect, and it can sit before **or** after the subject. **却** = a milder “but, yet,” and it can only come **after** the subject. 反而 often completes the pattern 不但没 / 不但不 ..., 反而

Structure: (Subj.) 反而 + opposite outcome · Subj. + 却 + contrast

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 帮 |bāng|helped / 了 |le / 他 |tā|him / , 他 |tā|yet he / 反而 |fǎn ér|on the contrary / 生气 |shēng qì|got angry / 了 |le / 。 }

I helped him, yet he got angry instead.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|likes / 甜食 |tián shí|sweets / , 却 |què|but / 从不 |cóng bù|never / 吃 |chī|eats / 巧克力 |qiǎo kè lì|chocolate / 。 }

She likes sweets, but never eats chocolate.

Remember: 反而 = the **OPPOSITE** of what you’d expect (a reversal); 却 = a plain “but / yet” (a contrast). 反而 can go before or after the subject and completes 不但没 ... 反而 ...; 却 only sits *after* the subject.

Watch out

- 却 can’t lead the clause — 她却 ..., never 却她 ...; 反而 is freer.

根本 vs. 到底 — “(not) at all” vs. “in the end, on earth”

根本 = “(not) at all, simply, fundamentally” — it intensifies a **negation** (根本不 / 根本没), flatly denying something. **到底** = “after all, in the end” or, in a question, “on earth / exactly” — it presses for the **final result or truth**. You can’t swap them.

Structure: 根本 + 不 / 没 + Verb · 到底 + Question

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 根本 |gēn běn|simply / 没 |méi|didn’t / 出去 |chū qù|go out / , 你 |nǐ|how / 怎么 |zěn me / 会 |huì|could / 看到 |kàn dào|have seen / 我 |wǒ|me / ? }

I didn’t go out at all — how could you have seen me?

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 到底 |dào dǐ|on earth / 想 |xiǎng|what do you want / 怎么样 |zěn me yàng / ? }

What on earth do you want?

Remember: 根本 intensifies a **NEGATION** (“not at all”: 根本不/没); 到底 presses for an **ANSWER** (“on earth / in the end”). One flatly *denies*, the

other *demands the truth*. In a statement, 到底 = “after all, it turned out...”.

Watch out

- 根本 leans on a following 不 / 没; 到底 leans on a question word or a result.

根据 vs. 据 — “according to” (long vs. short)

These overlap in meaning — “according to, on the basis of” — but differ in style. **据** is terse and literary, and pairs with **single-character or short** items (据说, 据实, 据悉). **根据** is the everyday word, takes **two-or-more-character** objects, and can also act as a noun.

Structure: 据 + short word + Clause · 根据 + (longer) source + Clause

{zh: 据 |jù|it is / 说 |shuō|said / , 他 |tā|he / 已经 |yǐ jīng|has already / 出国 |chū guó|gone abroad / 了 |le / 。 }

It’s said he’s already gone abroad.

{zh: 根据 |gēn jù|according to / 调查 |diào chá|the survey / 结果 |jié guǒ|results / , 大家 |dà jiā|everyone / 都 |dōu / 很 |hěn|is very / 满意 |mǎn yì|satisfied / 。 }

According to the survey results, everyone is very satisfied.

Remember: 据 = terse/literary + **SHORT** items (据说, 据悉, 据实); 根据 = everyday + longer objects, and a noun too. Same idea, opposite ends of the formality scale.

Watch out

- 据 wants a tight, short partner (据说 ✓); a longer source takes 根据 (根据调查结果).

恢复 vs. 还原 — “recover / restore” vs. “return to the original”

Both mean returning to a former state, but with a different feel. **恢复** = “recover, restore” something that was **damaged, disrupted or lost** — health, order, normal service. **还原** = “return to the **exact** original state, reset, reduce” — it stresses going back precisely to how it was (it’s also the chemistry term “reduce”).

Structure: 恢复 + Noun (health / order) · 把 ... 还原 (成 ...)

{zh: 经过 |jīng guò|after / 治疗 |zhì liáo|treatment / , 他 |tā|he / 的 |de / 身体 |shēn tǐ|health / 慢慢 |màn màn|slowly / 恢复 |huī fù|recovered / 了 |le / 。 }

After treatment, his health slowly recovered.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 可以 |kě yǐ|can / 把 |bǎ / 设置 |shè zhì|the settings / 还原 |huán yuán|restore / 成 |chéng|to / 默认值 |mò rèn zhí|the defaults / 。 }

You can reset the settings to the defaults.

Remember: 恢复 = bring back something DAMAGED/lost (health, order); 还原 = return to the EXACT original / reset. 恢复健康 (recover) vs 还原设置 (reset to factory). 还原 stresses *precisely as before*, with no “was broken” overtone.

Watch out

- For health/order coming back, it's 恢复 — 还原 sounds like a reset/reduction.

居然 vs. 反而 — “surprisingly” vs. “on the contrary”

Both flag the unexpected, but differently. 居然 = “surprisingly, to one’s astonishment” — it simply marks the event as **astonishing**, often letting the speaker tack on a comment. 反而 = “on the contrary” — it marks a **reversal**, the opposite of what should have followed, and pairs with 不但没 / 不但不 ..., 反而 ..., where 居然 can’t.

Structure: 居然 + astonishing fact (+ comment) · 不但没 / 不但不 ..., 反而 ...

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 这么 |zhè me|so / 小 |xiǎo|young / 居然 |jū rán|astonishingly / 能 |néng|can / 背 |bèi|recite / 几百 |jǐ bǎi|hundreds of / 首 |shǒu / 唐诗 |Táng shī|Tang poems / , 真 |zhēn|truly / 了不起 |liǎo bu qǐ|remarkable / 。 }

So young, yet he can recite hundreds of Tang poems — truly remarkable.

{zh: 吃 |chī|after taking / 了 |le / 这些 |zhè xiē|these / 药 |yào|pills / , 他 |tā|he / 不但 |bú dàn|not only / 没 |méi|didn’t / 好 |hǎo|get better / , 反而 |fǎn ér|but instead / 更 |gèng|got even / 严重 |yán zhòng|worse / 了 |le / 。 }

After taking these pills, not only did he not improve — he got worse.

Remember: 居然 = “astonishingly!” (just marks surprise, + optional comment); 反而 = “on the contrary” (a reversal). Only 反而 completes 不但没 / 不但不 ..., 反而 居然 is amazement; 反而 is a flip.

Watch out

- A surprise that isn’t a *reversal* takes 居然; the “opposite happened” twist takes 反而.

一度 vs. 一时 — “at one time” vs. “for a (short) while”

Both touch on time but mean different spans. 一度 = “once, at one time” — a **past phase** (often a difficult one: 一度想放弃), and it appears in 一年一度 (“annual”). 一时 = “for a short while, momentarily, for the moment” — brief or sudden, often “can’t ... right now” (一时想不起来).

Structure: 一度 + past Verb phrase · 一时 + (不能) Verb

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 过去 |guò qù|in the past / 一度 |yí dù|at one time / 想 |xiǎng|wanted to / 放弃 |fàng qì|give up / 。 }

At one point in the past he wanted to give up.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 一时 |yí shí|for the moment / 想不起来 |xiǎng bu qǐ lái|can’t recall / 他 |tā|his / 的 |de / 名字 |míng zi|name / 。 }

I can’t recall his name for the moment.

Remember: 一度 = “once, at one time” (a PAST phase; also 一年一度 = “annual”); 一时 = “for a brief moment / right now” (一时想不起来). 度 = a stretch/opportunity; 时 = a moment.

Watch out

- 一时 is the “can’t ... *just now*” word — don’t use 一度 for a momentary lapse.

一直 vs. 一向 — “all along (continuously)” vs. “all along (habitually)”

Both mean “all along,” but one is an unbroken stretch and the other a long-standing habit. 一直 = “continuously, the whole time” — an unbroken action from some point, and it can even run **into the future** (我会一直支持你). 一向 = “consistently, habitually up to now” — a settled trait, and it only reaches up to the **present**.

Structure: 一直 + Verb (can be future) · 一向 + habit / trait (up to now)

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 会 |huì|will / 一直 |yí zhí|always / 支持 |zhī chí|support / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

I will always support you.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 一向 |yí xiàng|has always / 很 |hěn|been very / 守时 |shǒu shí|punctual / 。 }

He’s always been punctual.

Remember: 一直 = an UNBROKEN stretch (can extend into the FUTURE: 会一直支持你); 一向 = a HABITUAL trait, only up to NOW (一向很守时).
Continuous line vs settled habit.

Watch out

- For a promise reaching forward, only 一直 works — 一向 can't point to the future.