

# Nouns

## HSK 5

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

### 当中 (among / in the middle of)

#### ■ The tallest classmate is not automatically the tallest pupil

- In a class comparison, 同学当中, 他最高。 says he is tallest among the classmates being discussed. A pupil in another class could still be taller: the sentence supplies a comparison group, not a school-wide survey.
- If you mean all the pupils in the school, name that wider group. Keeping the same adjective while changing the group changes the claim; the tallest classmate has not quietly grown taller during the sentence.

A comparison group limits the ranking

Group: 同学当中

他最高 → tallest within these classmates

Wider group: the whole school

A taller pupil elsewhere is still possible

Physical middle: 房间当中

Location in a room, rather than a group ranking

Read the noun phrase before choosing the meaning of 当中.

#### ■ Put the group before 当中 in this pattern

- **Group + 当中 + comment** gives a frame for the statement. You can also use **在 + group + 当中**: 在这些学生当中, 她最有经验。 – Among these students, she has the most experience.
- The pattern describes position within a group. It does not say that every member shares the stated quality, or that the group is physically standing in the middle of a room.

同学当中, 他最高。

tóng xué dāng zhōng tā zuì gāo

Word guide: 同学 – classmates; 当中 – among; 他 – he; 最 – most; 高 – tall.

### ■ A physical middle is another reading

- **桌子放在房间当中。** places a table in the middle of the room. Here 当中 concerns location; there is no comparison between pupils.
- Choose the reading from the surrounding noun phrase and statement. A room can supply a physical space, while classmates supply a group. The English word “among” will not fit every occurrence.

**桌子放在房间当中。**

*zhuō zi fàng zài fáng jiān dāng zhōng*

Word guide: 桌子 – table; 放 – placed; 在 – in; 房间 – room; 当中 – the middle.

### ■ Distinguish one member from all members

- **这些学生当中，有三个人会游泳。** reports that three people in this group can swim. It does not say that all students can swim or identify which three without more information.
- **他最高** makes a maximum claim within the named group. **他很高** describes him as tall without the same ranking. 当中 supplies the group frame; 最 supplies the superlative comparison in the opening example.

### ■ Transfer the frame without widening the evidence

- Original situation: four submitted designs are compared, and design B is cheapest. **这四个设计当中，B 最便宜。** keeps the claim within those four designs; it does not prove B is cheapest among every design available.
- When a new design enters the comparison, check its cost before repeating the ranking. Changing the group can change which member is cheapest, even when B’s own price stays the same.

### ■ Recall the frame, then check the scope

- Ask what group or space the noun phrase names, then what the comment actually claims. A group reading, a physical-middle reading and a statement about three members require different interpretations.
- Meaning reference: Ministry of Education dictionary: 当中. The class and design cases here are original practice. Read the full grammar reference for the unit map.
- Name the comparison group; do not turn a within-group claim into a wider ranking or a claim about every member.

### ■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: The tallest classmate is not automatically the tallest pupil. Decide what the speaker wanted to communicate. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

**One possible response:** 同学当中，他最高。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- **这些学生当中，有三个人会游泳。** reports that three people in this group can swim. It does not say that all students can swim or identify which three without more information.
- **他最高** makes a maximum claim within the named group. **他很高** describes him as tall without the same ranking. **当中** supplies the group frame; **最** supplies the superlative comparison in the opening example.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

## 彼此 (each other / one another)

### ■ Mutual trust runs in both directions

- Two teammates each trust the other: **我们彼此信任。** fits that relationship. "I trust her, but she does not trust me" describes one-way trust and does not support the same mutual claim.
- Identify the participants before describing reciprocity. Knowing that both people joined a team does not prove that they trust each other; the membership list has not read their minds.

#### Reciprocal does not mean equal in amount

**Mutual trust:** 彼此信任

Mei trusts Arun AND Arun trusts Mei

Only Mei's trust is stated

One direction does not establish mutual trust

**Mutual helping:** 彼此帮助

Neither exact minutes nor equal quantities are specified

彼此 can also be an object: 我们了解彼此。

■ Use 彼此 before the action or as its object

- 我们彼此信任。 and 我们互相信任。 can both describe mutual trust. Before this verb, the two expressions overlap in meaning.
- 我们了解彼此。 uses 彼此 as the object: we understand each other. Do not replace that object mechanically with 互相; the usual action-modifying pattern is 我们互相了解。

我们彼此信任。

*wǒ men bǐ cǐ xìn rèn*

Word guide: 我们 – we; 彼此 – each other; 信任 – trust.

■ Read the same relationship in a different arrangement

- 我们彼此了解。 and 我们了解彼此。 both express understanding of one another. A changed position can change the construction without changing this basic reciprocal meaning.
- 我们都了解老师。 has a different object: each of us understands the teacher. It does not itself state that we understand one another. Identify who is related to whom rather than selecting a familiar word alone.

我们了解彼此。

*wǒ men liǎo jiě bǐ cǐ*

Word guide: 我们 – we; 了解 – understand; 彼此 – each other.

■ Mutual does not mean identical in amount

- 他们彼此帮助。 describes helping one another. It does not establish that each person spent the same number of minutes, gave equal money or performed the same task.
- In a larger group, context identifies the reciprocal relationship. Do not infer from 彼此 alone that every possible pair performed every action equally often; that stronger description needs more detail.

■ 彼此彼此 can acknowledge a shared situation

- In a friendly exchange, one learner says “My handwriting is messy”; the other replies 彼此彼此。 In that context, the reply means roughly “same here”, acknowledging a similar situation.
- The repeated expression does not require an object after it in this reply. This conversational use differs from 了解彼此。 Interpret the exchange before translating every occurrence as a verb phrase with “each other”.

## ■ Transfer reciprocity to a new situation

- Two colleagues give each other reminders: **他们彼此提醒。** can describe reciprocal reminders. If only one sends reminders, state that direction instead; a reciprocal word cannot supply missing participation.
- Meaning reference: Ministry of Education dictionary: **彼此**. The teammate and reminder cases are original. Compare the unit reference with the earlier **互相** lesson.
- Check participants, direction and construction; mutual action does not establish equal quantities.

## ■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: Mutual trust runs in both directions. Decide what the speaker wanted to communicate. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

**One possible response:** 我们彼此信任。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- **他们彼此帮助。** describes helping one another. It does not establish that each person spent the same number of minutes, gave equal money or performed the same task.
- In a larger group, context identifies the reciprocal relationship. Do not infer from **彼此** alone that every possible pair performed every action equally often; that stronger description needs more detail.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

## ... 以来 (ever since)

### ■ A period from graduation is not a list of nonstop work

- At the present point in an original conversation, **毕业以来, 我一直很忙。** describes being busy over the period since graduation. The graduation event sets the start; the current conversation supplies the endpoint.
- This ordinary description does not claim that every second contained work or that the speaker never slept. **以来** frames the period; the rest of the sentence says what happened within it.

A since-period and its events have separate jobs

Start: 毕业 → reference point: this conversation

毕业以来 frames the period

Count: 回学校三次

Three returns, not continuous returning

Report written in 2024

A reader in 2026 still needs later evidence to update it

以来 frames time; the predicate supplies a count or state.

### ■ Place 以来 after the time or event expression

- 毕业以来 means since graduation in the modern use taught here. 三年以来 refers to the period over the past three years, reaching the current reference point.
- The preceding expression can name an event, a date or a duration. 以来 is not an English-style preposition placed before 毕业. Read the whole time phrase before deciding where its period begins.

毕业以来，我一直很忙。

*bì yè yǐ lái wǒ yì zhí hěn máng*

Word guide: 毕业 – graduation; 以来 – since; 我 – I; 一直 – all along; 很 – very; 忙 – busy.

### ■ The predicate supplies frequency, not 以来 alone

- 毕业以来，我回学校三次了。 describes three returns during the period since graduation. It does not turn those returns into a continuous action.
- Compare 毕业以来，我一直很忙。 The ongoing description comes from 一直很忙, while the counted events come from 三次. The same period marker can frame different kinds of events or states.

毕业以来，我回学校三次了。

*bì yè yǐ lái wǒ huí xué xiào sān cì le*

Word guide: 毕业 – graduation; 以来 – since; 我 – I; 回 – return; 学校 – school; 三次 – three times.

### ■ Separate since, after and before

- **毕业以后，我搬到了上海。** locates a move after graduation; it does not itself describe a period continuing to now. **毕业以来，我回学校三次了。** counts returns across the since-period.
- **毕业以前** concerns time before graduation. These forms can describe events in the same life story but give different time relationships. Do not substitute them merely because the nearby nouns match.

### ■ A dated report supplies its own present

- A report written in **2024** says **2020 年以来，学校开了三门新课。** Its count reaches the report's reference point, not automatically the day you read it in 2026.
- When updating that report, check later course openings before repeating the count. **以来** does not silently update the evidence, just as a printed timetable cannot notice that you missed the bus.

### ■ Transfer the period while preserving the count

- Original statement: **这个月以来，我读了两本书。** frames two books read during the period since this month began. It does not claim two books every day or identify the titles without further information.
- Meaning reference: Ministry of Education concise dictionary: **以来**. Our dates, counts and examples are original teaching cases. See the unit reference.
- Read start, reference endpoint and predicate separately; the period marker does not supply a frequency or a new current count.

### ■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: A period from graduation is not a list of nonstop work. Decide what the speaker wanted to communicate. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

**One possible response:** 毕业以来，我一直很忙。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- **毕业以后，我搬到了上海。** locates a move after graduation; it does not itself describe a period continuing to now. **毕业以来，我回学校三次了。** counts returns across the since-period.
- **毕业以前** concerns time before graduation. These forms can describe events in the same life story but give different time relationships. Do not substitute them merely because the nearby nouns match.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

## 当 ... 的时候 (when ...)

### ■ A phone call during cooking is not a call after dinner

- Original account: 当我做饭的时候，电话响了。 places the ringing phone within the time when I was cooking. It does not say that cooking had finished before the phone rang.
- 我做完饭以后，电话响了。 instead places the call after I finished cooking. The phone is the same, but the time relation has changed; grammar cannot rescue the dinner from an interruption.

#### During cooking differs from after cooking finished

当我做饭的时候，电话响了。

The phone rings within the cooking time frame

我做完饭以后，电话响了。

The phone rings after cooking is completed

What remains unstated

The caller's identity and reason need more information

A time relationship does not itself establish a cause.

### ■ Frame a time with 当 ... 的时候

- 当 + clause + 的时候, main clause provides a when/while frame. In 当我回家的时候，天黑了。 , the homecoming is the time frame for the statement about darkness.
- This taught full pattern ends its time clause with 的时候. Chinese also has shorter time expressions such as 我回家的时候 and 当时; this is not a rule that every use of 当 must contain the same closing words.

当我回家的时候，天黑了。

dāng wǒ huí jiā de shí hou tiān hēi le

Word guide: 当 – when; 我 – I; 回家 – get home; 的时候 – when; 天 – sky; 黑 – dark.

### ■ Let the actions determine moment or interval

- In 当我做饭的时候，电话响了, cooking supplies an interval and ringing happens within that frame. 当我到家的时候 can frame the point of arrival instead.
- 当 ... 的时候 does not impose one fixed action duration. Read whether the event is a process, an arrival or a repeated situation; do not translate every example as either “after” or a long continuous action.

当我做饭的时候，电话响了。

*dāng wǒ zuò fàn de shí hou diàn huà xiǎng le*

Word guide: 当 – while; 我 – I; 做饭 – cook; 的时候 – when; 电话 – phone; 响 – ring.

■ **A time frame does not establish a cause**

- 当我到家的时候，下雨了。 puts rain and arrival in a time relationship. It does not prove that my arrival caused the rain.
- Likewise, the phone ringing during cooking does not say who called or why. Timing, cause and identity are separate claims; additional words are needed to establish the latter two.

■ **Keep the relationship in a new scene**

- You were reading when a friend arrived: 当我看书的时候，朋友来了。 fits that frame. If the friend came only after you finished the book, use a completion-plus-after expression instead.
- For a future or recurring situation, the surrounding sentence supplies its time: 当你需要帮助的时候，给我打电话。 – Call me when you need help. 当 ... 的时候 alone is not a past-tense marker.

■ **Ask when, then check what remains unknown**

- Identify the time-frame clause and the main event. Choose when/while versus after from their stated relationship, without inventing causation or an exact duration.
- The cooking, rain and reading scenes are original examples. Compare the full unit reference and the 以来 lesson: a during-event frame and a since-period do different jobs.
- A time clause locates the event; it does not itself identify a cause, a caller or a tense.

## ■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: A phone call during cooking is not a call after dinner. Decide what the speaker wanted to communicate. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

**One possible response:** 当我做饭的时候，电话响了。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 当我到家的时候，下雨了。 puts rain and arrival in a time relationship. It does not prove that my arrival caused the rain.
- Likewise, the phone ringing during cooking does not say who called or why. Timing, cause and identity are separate claims; additional words are needed to establish the latter two.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

## Noun + 这个 + Category (sizing up)

### ■ A person frame can introduce praise as well as criticism

- In an original team discussion, 他这个人很热情。 presents a comment about him as a person: he is warm and welcoming. 这个人 helps frame the person being discussed; it does not make the comment negative.
- Compare 他这个人有点儿粗心。 – He is a little careless. The evaluation changes with the predicate. The same frame can introduce praise or a reservation; it has not decided the verdict before hearing the evidence.

The frame does not decide the evaluation

他这个人 + 很热情

A warm, positive comment in the team discussion

他这个人 + 有点儿粗心

A reservation about carelessness

这个……我还没决定。

A possible hesitation use in another exchange

Read topic, category, comment and conversational context together.

## ■ Read the topic and its category together

- 他 + 这个人 + **comment** frames “him as a person” for the following statement. In 北京这个城市很大, the city category frames a comment about Beijing.
- Choose a category that fits what you are discussing. This is not an instruction to insert 这个 before every noun. Pronouns and names can take such a frame, so “noun” in a lesson label is a useful shorthand rather than a complete grammar rule.

他这个人很热情。

*tā zhè ge rén hěn rè qíng*

Word guide: 他 – he; 这个 – this; 人 – person; 很 – very; 热情 – warm.

## ■ The following words supply the actual comment

- 他这个人很热情 describes his manner, while 他这个人有点儿粗心 describes carelessness. Neither sentence by itself tells you his age, job or the number of people who agree.
- In this discussion the longer person frame can emphasise the person as the topic. 他很热情 is also grammatical. Tone depends on the predicate, delivery and context; the frame alone does not guarantee a hostile or intimate attitude.

他这个人有点儿粗心。

*tā zhè ge rén yǒu diǎnr cū xīn*

Word guide: 他 – he; 这个 – this; 人 – person; 有点儿 – a little; 粗心 – careless.

## ■ Distinguish a frame from an ordinary demonstrative

- 这个人是我的老师。 can simply identify this person as my teacher. There is no earlier 他 topic followed by a personal assessment in that sentence.
- 他这个人很热情。 frames him for a comment. Both contain 这个人, but the wider sentence tells you what it is doing; the string alone is not a reliable tone detector.

## ■ A hesitation use needs the spoken exchange

- 这个 ..... 我还没决定。 can use 这个 as a hesitation before “I have not decided yet”. It is not the person-frame pattern and supplies no named category such as 人 or 城市 here.
- A pause alone does not make every 这个 a filler: someone could pause while pointing to a real object. Check the exchange and referent. Written examples illustrate possible uses; actual delivery may clarify the meaning.

## ■ Transfer the frame without assuming a verdict

- 北京这个城市交通很方便。 frames Beijing for a comment about transport convenience. It does not claim that every aspect of life there is convenient; the following words identify what is assessed.
- Our team and city examples are original practice. See the unit reference; identify the topic, category and comment before choosing an interpretation.

- Read what is framed and what is said about it; 这个 alone does not establish criticism or hesitation.

### ■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: A person frame can introduce praise as well as criticism. Decide what the speaker wanted to communicate. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

**One possible response:** 他这个人很热情。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- **这个人是我的老师。** can simply identify this person as my teacher. There is no earlier 他 topic followed by a personal assessment in that sentence.
- **他这个人很热情。** frames him for a comment. Both contain 这个人, but the wider sentence tells you what it is doing; the string alone is not a reliable tone detector.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.