

Sentence patterns – focus & existence

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.

要不是 (if it weren't for)

■ A friend gets you to the right place

- A friend guides you through unfamiliar streets, and you arrive without getting lost. You say **要不是你，我就迷路了。** – If it had not been for you, I would have got lost.
- Keep two versions apart: the help actually happened; getting lost is the imagined alternative without that help.

■ Remove the helpful condition in imagination

- Use **要不是 + person / situation, result**. In this example, 你 stands for the friend's help; 就 introduces the imagined result.
- **要不是你帮忙的话，我就迷路了。** makes the help explicit. 的话 is optional here; it is not a separate actual event.

要不是你，我就迷路了。

yào bù shì nǐ wǒ jiù mí lù le

Word guide: 要不是 – if not for; 你 – you; 我 – I; 就 – then; 迷路 – get lost.

■ Read the two versions side by side

- Actual version: a friend guides you and you arrive safely. Imagined version: remove that help and picture getting lost.
- **我迷路了。** directly reports getting lost. The same words inside the 要不是 ... 就 ... alternative do not become an actual report.

Actual help and an imagined alternative

What happened: your friend guided you

You arrived without getting lost

要不是你，我就迷路了。

Imagine removing the help: getting lost

要不是你提醒，我可能就迟到了。

可能 makes the imagined lateness uncertain

An imagined result is not an actual event report.

■ Leave room for uncertainty

- **要不是你提醒，我可能就迟到了。** – Without your reminder, I might have been late. 可能 makes the imagined result less certain.
- The speaker credits the reminder. The sentence is not an experiment proving that it was the only possible way to arrive on time.

■ Compare an alternative with a thank-you

- **多亏你提醒，我才没迟到。** credits the reminder for avoiding lateness. **要不是你提醒，我就迟到了。** imagines lateness without it.
- Both can express gratitude in this situation. Their result clauses look in different directions: the actual good result, or an unreal bad alternative.

■ Change the event before choosing the pattern

- If you actually got lost and the friend never helped, 我迷路了 reports that event. Do not reuse the opening thank-you as its description.
- For a new situation, identify what happened first, then what is only imagined without the named condition.

■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: A friend gets you to the right place. 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: 要不是你，我就迷路了。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 要不是你提醒，我可能就迟到了。 – Without your reminder, I might have been late. 可能 makes the imagined result less certain.
- The speaker credits the reminder. The sentence is not an experiment proving that it was the only possible way to arrive on time.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

多亏 (thanks to / luckily)

■ A deliberate search finds the bag

- A friend helps search the station, finds your missing bag, and brings it back. 多亏了你，我才找到。 – Thanks to you, I found it.
- The speaker credits useful help. 多亏 can describe deliberate effort; it does not require a random lucky accident.

■ Name the contribution and the result

- Use 多亏 (了) + helpful person / event, result. 了 is optional in this pattern; 才 often highlights how the help enabled the result.
- In 多亏了你，我才找到, the understood object of 找到 is the missing bag from the conversation. Do not invent a different object.

多亏了你，我才找到。

duō kuī le nǐ wǒ cái zhǎo dào

Word guide: 多亏 – thanks to; 你 – you; 我 – I; 才 – only then; 找到 – found.

■ A negative event can be avoided successfully

- 多亏你提醒，我才没迟到。 – Thanks to your reminder, I was not late. 没迟到 is the beneficial result here.
- 多亏你提醒，我带了伞。 credits a reminder for bringing an umbrella. It works without 才, and does not claim that rain actually fell.

Credit the help and check the outcome

多亏了你，我才找到。

Helpful search → bag found

多亏你提醒，我才没迟到。

Helpful reminder → lateness avoided

多亏你提醒，我带了伞。

Helpful reminder → umbrella brought; no 才 required

A useful contribution need not be the only contribution.

■ Keep credit separate from ordinary blame

- In the bag example, 多亏了你 credits the friend for finding it. It does not blame them for losing it.
- An ironic tone could change a speaker's intention. With ordinary sincere thanks as our stated context, choose the beneficial contribution.

■ A contribution is not the whole story

- The friend searched and a station worker returned the bag. You may thank the friend without claiming that nobody else helped.
- If the bag is still missing, 我才找到 does not describe the stated outcome. The useful effort and a successful search are different claims.

■ Thank someone for what the evidence supports

- Name the help and its actual benefit: reminding someone to bring an umbrella, finding a bag, or preventing lateness.
- Choose 多亏 for the helpful contribution, then check the result clause. Do not add an outcome or an exclusive cause that the context never supplies.

■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: A deliberate search finds the bag. 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: 多亏了你，我才找到。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- In the bag example, 多亏了你 credits the friend for finding it. It does not blame them for losing it.
- An ironic tone could change a speaker's intention. With ordinary sincere thanks as our stated context, choose the beneficial contribution.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

... 而已 (that's all / nothing more)

■ A joke still has a listener

- After a comment, the speaker says 我只是开玩笑而已。 – I was only joking, that's all. This presents the comment as nothing more than a joke.
- The listener may still feel hurt. 而已 gives the speaker's limited account; it does not prove the effect on someone else.

■ Close the claim with 而已

- Put 而已 after the limited statement. 只是 ... 而已 and 不过 ... 而已 are common ways to stress "only this".
- 我只是开玩笑而已 limits the claimed intention to joking. The sentence does not establish agreement or forgiveness.

我只是开玩笑而已。

wǒ zhǐ shì kāi wán xiào ér yǐ

Word guide: 我 – I; 只是 – only; 开玩笑 – joke; 而已 – that's all.

■ Identify exactly what is limited

- 我只看了两页而已。 – I read only two pages. The limit concerns how much was read, not whether the reader understood them.
- 我只是提供建议而已。 – I only offered advice. The speaker limits their role; this does not say who made the final decision.

A limited claim leaves other questions open

我只看了两页而已。

Two pages read; understanding remains unstated

我只是开玩笑而已。

Speaker's claimed intention; listener's feelings unstated

两千元而已。

Speaker downplays the price; your budget is separate

而已 does not change a number or prove harmlessness.

■ Small to the speaker may be large to you

- 两千元而已。 – Only two thousand yuan. The speaker downplays the amount; it may still be expensive for the listener.
- The amount is not made smaller by the particle. Check a price against your budget instead of treating "only" as evidence of affordability.

■ Test a changed amount

- A report says 我只等了四分钟而已。 – I waited only four minutes. A friend's deadline was three minutes.
- Four minutes is longer than that deadline even if the speaker downplays it. The stated number and the speaker's attitude are different information.

■ Limit the claim, then check the facts

- Find the limited action, amount or role before paraphrasing 而已. Two pages, four minutes and giving advice limit different things.
- A speaker can minimise an event. The listener's feelings, the importance of the event and the accuracy of the account still need their own evidence.

■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: A joke still has a listener. 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: 我只是开玩笑而已。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- **两千元而已。** – Only two thousand yuan. The speaker downplays the amount; it may still be expensive for the listener.
- The amount is not made smaller by the particle. Check a price against your budget instead of treating “only” as evidence of affordability.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

Practise this pattern step by step.

将 (a formal 把)

■ A notice requests a closed door

- A written notice says **请将门关上。** – Please close the door. 将 introduces 门, the thing acted on, before 关上, the action and result.
- This is a request to change the door's state. Reading it does not establish that anyone has already closed the door.

■ Name the object, then what happens to it

- This pattern is **subject + 将 + object + verb phrase**. In a request beginning 请, the person asked to act may be understood rather than named.
- 请将门关上 has the same object-and-action structure as 请把门关上. 将 is common in formal written instructions.

请将门关上。

qǐng jiāng mén guān shàng

Word guide: 请 – please; 将 – (把); 门 – door; 关上 – close.

■ Read the requested result

- **请将文件放在桌上。** – Please put the document on the table. 文件 is the object; 放在桌上 tells where it should end up.
- Changing 桌上 to 包里 changes the requested destination. Naming the object alone does not give a complete instruction.

Read 将 in its sentence

请将门关上。

将 → 门 (object) → 关上 (requested action / result)

会议将举行。

会议 (subject) → 将举行 (future event)

门被关上了。

门 (subject) → 被关上了 (passive event report)

An instruction is different from evidence of completion.

■ The same character has another job

- **会议将举行。** – The meeting will be held. Here 将 signals a future event, with no introduced object between 将 and 举行.
- **门被关上了。** reports that the door was closed. 被 gives a passive report; it is not the instruction's 将 object marker.

■ Follow the object in a new instruction

- **请将旧文件删除。** – Please delete the old file. 旧文件 is the target; the instruction does not request deleting every file.
- **请不要将旧文件删除。** – Please do not delete the old file. 不要 changes the request while 将 still introduces its object.

■ Read the sentence around 将

- In 请将门关上, locate the object 门 and the requested result 关上. In 会议将举行, read 将 with the event that follows.
- Decide the word's role from its sentence. A future time mentioned elsewhere does not automatically turn every 将 into a future marker.

■ Try it with help closed

Recall the situation: A notice requests a closed door. 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: 请将门关上。

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
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- **会议将举行。** – The meeting will be held. Here 将 signals a future event, with no introduced object between 将 and 举行.
- **门被关上了。** reports that the door was closed. 被 gives a passive report; it is not the instruction's 将 object marker.
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Practise this pattern step by step.