

Adverbs

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

+ + — “(did it) again” (in the past)

Something already happened **one more time**? Reach for (yòu) — “again, once more.” It looks **backward** at a repeat that’s done, and it often carries a flick of annoyance, like English “*again*?!” (For “again” in the *future*, you want instead — see the contrast below.)

Structure: (Subject +) + Verb + *Literally: “again — [verb] — (and it’s happened).”*

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yòu|again / |chí dào|late / |le / 。 }

You’re late again.

{zh: |yòu|again / |xià yǔ|rain / |le / ! }

It’s raining again!

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |yòu|again / |yào|have to / |jiā bān|work overtime / |le / ! }

We’ve got to work overtime again today!

Remember: looks back, looks forward. = “here we go again” (it happened); = “do it once more” (it will). Future takes no ; past needs it.

Watch out

- also works with negatives: (“he didn’t come *again*”).
- For something about to repeat, pair it with : ... (“here it comes again”).

— “all along, continuously”

is literally “**one straight (line)**” — picture a single, unbroken line drawn through time. It describes an action or state that runs **non-stop** over a stretch — “continuously, the whole time, all along.” English often lands it as “always.”

Structure: Subject + + Predicate *Literally: “in one straight line, [predicate].”*

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yì zhí|all along / |hěn|very / |xǐ huan|like / |nǐ|you / 。 }

I’ve liked you all along.

{zh: |lǎo bǎn|the boss / |yì zhí|always / |hěn|very / |máng|busy / 。 }

The boss is always busy.

{zh: |shí bā suì|eighteen / |yǐ hòu|after / , |tā|he / |yì zhí|has ... ever since / |yí ge rén|alone / |zhù|lived / 。 }

Since he was eighteen, he’s lived alone the whole time.

Remember: = **one straight line through time** — no breaks. It’s *unbroken duration*; for a repeating *habit* (“always does X”), switch to .

Watch out

- It often pairs with () or ().
- also means “go straight ahead” — the same “straight line” idea, in space.

— “always” (a habit)

is “always” in the sense of a **habit or consistent pattern** — something that just keeps recurring. means “all in all, in every case,” so says “*in every case, it’s like this.*” It’s neutral in tone and sits before the verb.

Structure: Subject + + Verb · with an adjective: + / + Adj

{zh: |tā|he / |zǒng shì|always / |chí dào|late / 。 }

He’s always late.

{zh: |nǐ|your / |jiā|home / |zǒng shì|always / |hěn|very / |gān jìng|clean / 。 }

Your home is always so clean.

Remember: = “in every case.” is the **neutral** “always” (a pattern); its grumbling twin (below) adds the eye-roll.

Watch out

- Before an **adjective** you must add a degree word: ✓, not .
- = a *recurring habit*; = one *unbroken* stretch. “He’s always late” (each time) is ; “it rained the whole time” is .

— “finally, at last”

marks something **finally happening after a long wait** — and it glows with **relief or joy**. is “the end / finish line” (the of), so is “*at the finish line, it came.*” Unlike English “finally,” it can’t stand alone, move to the front, or end a sentence — and it must team up with .

Structure: Subject + + Predicate +

{zh: |nǐ|you / |zhōng yú|finally / |dào|arrived / |le / ! }

You’re finally here!

{zh: |zuò yè|the homework / |zhōng yú|finally / |zuò|done / |wán|finished / |le / ! }

I’ve finally finished the homework!

Remember: = the **finish line** you’ve been straining toward — is the sigh of relief as you cross it, always sealed with .

Watch out

- The **is obligatory** — ... ; never bare like English “finally” on its own.
- It implies a *welcome* outcome. For a flat, neutral “in the end,” use .

— “nearly, almost”

means “nearly, almost” — it gets you right up to the line without quite crossing it. It loves company: it very often teams up with an “**all**” **word** (, , ...) or a “**none**” **word** (,).

Structure: + / Subject + + [/] + Predicate

{zh: |jī hū|almost / |měi ge rén|everyone / |dōu|all / |yǒu|has / |shǒu jī|a phone / . }

Almost everyone has a phone.

{zh: |jī hū|almost / |méi yǒu|no / |rén|one / |xiāng xìn|believes / |tā|him / . }

Almost no one believes him.

{zh: |wǒ|my / |lǎo bǎn|boss / |jī hū|hardly / |bù|ever / |hē jiǔ|drinks / . }

My boss hardly ever drinks.

Remember: think of as a needle stopping **just short** of the mark. + → “almost all”; + → “almost none”; / → “hardly ever.”

Watch out

- It points to one extreme (all or none) — pair it with a / / to land the meaning.

— “only”

(zhǐ) is the everyday word for “only.” It’s an **adverb**, so it clings to the **verb** (or an auxiliary like /) — never to the noun the way English “only” floats around.

Structure: + Verb · + / + Verb

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zhǐ|only / |yǒu|have / |yí ge|one / |gē ge|older brother / . }

I only have one older brother.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zhǐ|only / |xiǎng|want / |gēn|to be with / |nǐ|you / |zài yì qǐ|together / . }

I only want to be with you.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zhǐ|only / |néng|can / |shuō|say / |liǎng|two / |jù|sentences / |Zhōng wén|Chinese / . }

I can only say a couple of sentences in Chinese.

Remember: sits **on the verb:** (“I only *have* one”), never . English “only” wanders; Chinese stays glued to the verb.

Watch out

- (zhǐ, “only”) is written the same as (zhī), the measure word for animals () — same character, two readings and jobs.

Duration + + + — how long you *haven’t* done something

Here’s a word order that trips up English speakers. To say **how long you have NOT done** something, the duration jumps **in front of** the verb: **time** + + **verb** + . Compare the normal ”did it for ten years” (verb first), and you’ll see the mirror image.

Structure: Subject + (+) Duration + + Verb +

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |yǐ jīng|already / |shí nián|ten years / |méi|haven't / |jiàn|met / |le / 。 }

We haven't seen each other for ten years now.

{zh: |tā|he / |yí ge xīng qī|a week / |méi|hasn't / |xǐ zǎo|showered / |le / 。 }

He hasn't showered in a week.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |duō jiǔ|how long / |méi|haven't / |huí jiā|been home / |le / ? }

How long has it been since you went home?

Remember: “have done” puts time after the verb; “haven’t done” puts time before it. = “watched *for* ten years”; = “haven’t watched *in* ten years.” The here means “and counting.”

Watch out

- Chinese avoids “since [a time point].” Say a *duration* instead (...), or ... (“the last time was...”).

Time + + — “not until” (lateness)

(cái) drags an action **later than expected** — “not until, as late as.” If says “already, sooner than you’d think,” is its grumpy opposite: “only then, finally, took its time.”

Structure: Subject + Time + + Verb

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zuó tiān|yesterday / |shí yī diǎn|eleven o'clock / |cái|not until / |dào jiā|got home / 。 }

I didn't get home until eleven last night.

{zh: |tā|he / |èr shí wǔ suì|twenty-five / |cái|not until / |shàng|started / |dà xué|university / 。 }

He didn't start university until he was twenty-five.

Remember: = late / barely (= early / already). And takes **no** — the lateness is the point, not a completed result: ✓, never .

Watch out

- Same character does double duty: before a *time* it means “late” (this point); before a *number* it means “only a little” (point 2.12 below).

... , ... — “first ..., then ...”

To line events up **in order**, frame them with ... — “first ..., (and) then ...” The trap: here means “**then** / **next**,” not its usual “again.”

Structure: + Verb 1 , + Verb 2

{zh: |xiān|first / |xǐ shǒu|wash hands / , |zài|then / |chī|eat / 。 }

Wash your hands first, then eat.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yào|should / |xiān|first / |zuò|do / |zuò yè|homework / , |zài|then / |kàn|watch / |diàn shì|TV / 。 }

Do your homework first, then watch TV.

Remember: in, is the “**and then**” of a sequence, not “again.” Picture two stepping stones: step on first, then .

Watch out

- ... means “do X first, *then* we’ll see” — a “deal with it later” feeling: .
- Chain longer sequences with (“and then”) and (“next”).

... ... — doing two things at once

Two deliberate actions happening **at the same time**? Frame both with ... — “(do X) while (doing Y).” means “side,” so it’s literally “*on one side ... on the other side ...*” — two tracks running together.

Structure: Subject + + Verb 1 (,) + Verb 2

{zh: |wǒ|I / |cháng cháng|often / |yì biān|while / |xǐ zǎo|showering / , |yì biān / |chàng gē|sing / 。 }

I often sing in the shower.

{zh: |bié|don't / |yì biān|while / |kāi chē|driving / , |yì biān / |dǎ diàn huà|make calls / 。 }

Don't make calls while driving.

Remember: = “**side**” — one action on each side, at once. Casually it shrinks to ... (, “chatting as we walk”).

Watch out

- Both actions must be **intentional**; for “while X was going on,” use

- The *main* action is usually the **second** one in Chinese (English often flips the order).

— “always” (a complaint)

(or just) also means “always” — but it’s the **grumbling** version, loaded with frustration, like “you’re *always* on your phone.” Swap it in for anywhere you want to add an eye-roll.

Structure: Subject + () + Predicate

{zh: |nǐ|you / |zěn me|why / |lǎo shì|always / |chí dào|late / ? }

Why are you always late?

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |jī qì|machine / |lǎo shì|always / |chū|having / |wèn tí|trouble / 。 }

This machine is always breaking down.

Remember: is neutral; **complains.** If you could add “ugh” to the English, use .

Watch out

- It’s a **complaint** — don’t use it for something good (use there).
- Before an adjective, add / / : .

+ — “only” (a small number)

A second job for (cái): drop it before a **number** and it stresses the amount is **smaller than you’d expect** — “only, just, a mere.” Where the “lateness” says “late,” this one says “barely that much.”

Structure: + Number + Measure Word + Noun · + Verb + Number + MW + Noun

{zh: |nǐ|you / |cái|only / |èr shí suì|twenty / ? }

You’re only twenty?

{zh: |zhè jiā|this / |diàn|shop / |cái|only / |kāi yè|been open / |yí ge|one / |xīng qī|week / 。 }

This shop has only been open a week.

{zh: |tā men|they / |cái|only / |rèn shi|known each other / |sān ge yuè|three months / ! }

They’ve only known each other three months!

Remember: one , two jobs — before a **time** it drags things *late* (2.8); before a **number** it shrinks the amount to *only that much*. Both share the feeling “less than expected.”

Watch out

- After + verb, the is optional: ≈ .