

Nouns

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

Time / + — “before (a specific point)”

Place (yǐqián) *after* a time or an action to mean “before” it. The trap for English speakers is the **order**: the reference point comes **first**, then — the exact reverse of “before eating,” which Chinese says as “eating-before.”

Structure: Time / Verb Phrase + ,

{zh: |chī fàn|eating / |yǐ qián|before / , |nǐ|you / |xǐ shǒu|wash hands / |le / |ma / ? }

Did you wash your hands before eating?

{zh: |xīng qī wǔ|Friday / |yǐ qián|before / , |nǐ|you / |yào|need to / |zuò wán|finish / |zhè xiē|this / |gōng zuò|work / 。 }

You need to finish this work before Friday.

Remember: Chinese stamps the time-word **after** the event: = “eating-before.” Flip the English order and tack on the end.

Watch out

- “Verb + ” means “before [doing] the action” (= “before doing homework”).

..... — “in the past, before” (general)

Drop at the **front** of a sentence and it means “in the past, back then” — a general earlier time, no specific event attached. It can also slip in right after the subject.

Structure: + Subject + Verb · Subject + + Verb

{zh: |yǐ qián|in the past / , |wǒ|I / |bú huì|couldn’t / |shuō|speak / |Zhōng wén|Chinese / 。 }

I couldn’t speak Chinese before.

{zh: |tā|he / |yǐ qián|used to / |shì|be / |chú shī|a chef / 。 }

He used to be a chef.

Remember: one , two spots — **after an event** it’s “before X” (); **at the front** it’s “in the past, used to.” It usually contrasts the past with now (often with a marking the change).

Watch out

- Front position or after-the-subject — both are correct.

— “just now, a moment ago”

(gāngcái) is a **time word** for the very recent past — “just now, a moment ago.” Don’t confuse it with the adverb : is a *noun* (a moment that just passed) and can stand alone, while (“just”) clings to the verb.

Structure: (Subject +) + Verb

{zh: |nǐ|you / |gāng cái|just now / |shuō|said / |shén me|what / |le / ? }

What did you just say?

{zh: |gāng cái|just now / |shéi|who / |lái|came / |le / ? }

Who came just now?

Remember: = a **noun** (a moment in the past, can sit anywhere); = **an adverb** (glued to the verb). (“I just arrived”) vs (“who came a moment ago?”).

Watch out

- can take a / on the verb (); + verb usually doesn’t.

Time / Event + — “when, at the time of”

is a compact, **formal** stand-in for — “when, at the time of” — placed after a time or event. The thing to remember: it drops the .

Structure: Time / Event + ,

{zh: |kǎo shì|exam / |shí|during / |bú yào|don’t / |shuō huà|talk / 。 }

Don’t talk during the exam.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |miàn shì|interviews / |shí|during / |jīng cháng|often / |wèn|ask / |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|question / 。 }

I often ask this question during interviews.

Remember: is **in its Sunday best** — same meaning, formal register, and **no** : ✓, never . In speech you’d just say .

Watch out

- Reserve it for writing or set phrases; everyday speech uses .

..... — “in the future, from now on”

At the start of a sentence, means “in the future, from now on, later.” It mirrors exactly: it can sit at the front (“from now on”), after the subject, or after an event (“after ...”).

Structure: + Subject + Verb + Event + ,

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yǐ hòu|from now on / |bù|won’t / |hē jiǔ|drink / |le / 。 }

I won’t drink from now on.

{zh: |xià kè|class ends / |yǐ hòu|after / , |wǒ men|we / |qù|go / |chī fàn|eat / 。 }

After class, let’s go eat.

Remember: is the perfect **mirror of** — after an event = “after X” (/); at the front = “from now on” / “in the past.” But it points to an *indefinite* future, **not** “in a moment” (that’s).

Watch out

- Don’t let “later” mislead you into using it for “shortly” — is the open-ended future.

..... , — “afterwards, later” (past only)

(hòulái) sequences **past** events — “afterwards, later on.” The hard limit: both events must have **already happened**. (after) + (came) — it has, by definition, *already come*.

Structure: [Past Event 1] , [Past Event 2]

{zh: |kāi shǐ|at first / |wǒ|my / |fù mǔ|parents / |bù|didn’t / |tóng yì|agree / , |hòu lái|later / |tóng yì|agreed / |le / 。 }

At first my parents disapproved; later they came round.

{zh: |tā|he / |yǐ qián|used to / |shì|be / |chú shī|a chef / , |hòu lái|later / |dāng|became / |le / |lǎo bǎn|the boss / 。 }

He used to be a chef; later he became the boss.

Remember: = a **PAST “and then”** (both events done and dusted). For a *future* “and then,” switch to . The (“came”) tells you it has already arrived.

Watch out

- Never use for a plan or future sequence — that’s .