

Comparing similar adverbs

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

vs — “late / hard” vs “early / easy”

These two adverbs are a matched pair pulling in **opposite directions**. Both sit before the verb after a time or condition, but 说 says something happened **later or with more effort than expected** (often a touch impatient), while 早 says it happened **sooner or more easily than expected**.

{zh: |lǎo bǎn|the boss / |shí yī diǎn|eleven / |cái|not until / |dào|arrived / 。 }

The boss didn't get in until eleven.

{zh: |tā|he / |liù diǎn|six / |jiù|already / |dào|arrived / |le / 。 }

He was already here by six.

Remember: 迟 **drags late (no)**; 早 **jumps early (+)**. A neat tell: the 早 lines up with (“already happened, ”) and avoids (“late, nothing tidily completed, ”).

Watch out

- = slower / later / harder than expected (sometimes annoyed); = faster / earlier / easier.
- The verb after takes **no** ; in the “already” sense usually **does**.

vs — adverb vs time word

Same “just,” two different word-classes. 刚 is an **adverb** (“just,” sitting right before the verb); 刚才 is a **time noun** (“a moment ago,” roughly the last 1–30 minutes) that can stand on its own and even modify a noun.

{zh: |lǎo bǎn|the boss / |gāng|just / |zǒu|left / 。 }

The boss just left.

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

What did you just say?

Remember: 刚 = **adverb**, glued to the verb (); 刚才 = **noun**, free-standing (, “the thing just now”). 刚 often skips when the verb already carries a result; 刚才 is firmly past and pairs with 了.

Watch out

- Before an **adjective**, only / works: (“the sky just cleared”) — never .

vs — “a bit too” vs “a little (more)”

Both translate as “a bit,” but they sit on **opposite sides** of the adjective and carry opposite moods. () goes **before** an adjective with a hint of **complaint** (“a bit too ...”); () goes **after** an adjective to mark a small **amount or degree** (in comparisons or requests).

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |wǒ|I’m / |yǒu diǎn|a bit / |lèi|tired / 。 }

I’m a bit tired today.

{zh: |qǐng|please / |shuō|speak / |màn|slowly / |yì diǎn|a little / 。 }

Please speak a little more slowly.

Remember: + Adj = a grumble before (“a bit *too* tired”); Adj + = a measured amount after (“a little slower”). Position tells you the mood: before = complaint, after = neutral nudge.

Watch out

- + Noun = “a little (of)”: , — can’t do this.
- / = “not at all”: .

vs — future vs past “again”

Both mean “again,” but they split cleanly on **time**: is “again” for something **not yet done** (a future or intended repeat); is “again” for something that **has already happened**.

{zh: |huān yíng|welcome / |zài|again / |lái|come / ! }

Come again!

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

You’re late again.

Remember: looks forward (plan/intend, no); looks back (already repeated, usually +). (please come again) vs (here you are again). The sides with .

Watch out

- also means “another” () and “(do A) then (B)” (.....); also stacks qualities ().