

Adverbs

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

又 + 动词 + 了 — “(did it) again” (in the past)

Something already happened **one more time**? Reach for 又 (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 再 instead — see the contrast below.)

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

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 又 |yòu|again / 迟到 |chí dào|late / 了 |le / 。 }

You’re late again.

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

It’s raining again!

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

We’ve got to work overtime again today!

Remember: 又 looks back, 再 looks forward. 又来了 = “here we go again” (it happened); 再来一次 = “do it once more” (it will). Future 再 takes no 了; past 又 needs it.

Watch out

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

一直 — “all along, continuously”

一直 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 + 一直 + Predicate *Literally: “in one straight line, [predicate].”*

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 一直 |yì zhí|all along / 很 |hěn|very / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|like / 你 |nǐ|you / 。 }

I've liked you all along.

{zh: 老板 |lǎo bǎn|the boss / 一直 |yì zhí|always / 很 |hěn|very / 忙 |máng|busy / 。 }

The boss is always busy.

{zh: 十八岁 |shí bā suì|eighteen / 以后 |yǐ hòu|after / , 他 |tā|he / 一直 |yì zhí|has ... ever since / 一个人 |yí ge rén|alone / 住 |zhù|lived / 。 }

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

Remember: 一直 = **one straight line through time** — no breaks. It's *unbroken duration*; for a repeating *habit* (“always does X”), switch to 总是.

Watch out

- It often pairs with 在 (一直在学习) or 都 (一直都不抽烟).
- 一直走 also means “go straight ahead” — the same “straight line” idea, in space.

总是 — “always” (a habit)

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

Structure: Subject + 总是 + Verb · with an adjective: 总是 + 很 / 特别 + Adj

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

He's always late.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|your / 家 |jiā|home / 总是 |zǒng shì|always / 很 |hěn|very / 干净 |gān jìng|clean / 。 }

Your home is always so clean.

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

Watch out

- Before an **adjective** you must add a degree word: 总是**很累** ✓, not 总是累.
- 总是 = a *recurring habit*; 一直 = one *unbroken stretch*. “He's always late” (each time) is 总是; “it rained the whole time” is 一直.

终于 — “finally, at last”

终于 marks something **finally happening after a long wait** — and it glows with **relief or joy**. 终 is “the end / finish line” (the 终 of 终点), so 终于 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 了.

Structure: Subject + 终于 + Predicate + 了

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 终于 |zhōng yú|finally / 到 |dào|arrived / 了 |le / ! }

You’re finally here!

{zh: 作业 |zuò yè|the homework / 终于 |zhōng yú|finally / 做 |zuò|done / 完 |wán|finished / 了 |le / ! }

I’ve finally finished the homework!

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

Watch out

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

几乎 — “nearly, almost”

几乎 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 (每, 所有, 全 ... 都) or a “**none**” word (没有, 不).

Structure: 几乎 + 每 / 所有 ... 都 ... · Subject + 几乎 + [不 / 没] + Predicate

{zh: 几乎 |jī hū|almost / 每个人 |měi ge rén|everyone / 都 |dōu|all / 有 |yǒu|has / 手机 |shǒu jī|a phone / 。 }

Almost everyone has a phone.

{zh: 几乎 |jī hū|almost / 没有 |méi yǒu|no / 人 |rén|one / 相信 |xiāng xìn|believes / 他 |tā|him / 。 }

Almost no one believes him.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 老板 |lǎo bǎn|boss / 几乎 |jī hū|hardly / 不 |bù|ever / 喝酒 |hē jiǔ|drinks / 。 }

My boss hardly ever drinks.

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

Watch out

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

只 — “only”

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

Structure: 只 + Verb · 只 + 会 / 能 + Verb

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 只 |zhǐ|only / 有 |yǒu|have / 一个 |yí ge|one / 哥哥 |gē ge|older brother / 。 }

I only have one older brother.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 只 |zhǐ|only / 想 |xiǎng|want / 跟 |gēn|to be with / 你 |nǐ|you / 在一起 |zài yì qǐ|together / 。 }

I only want to be with you.

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 只 |zhǐ|only / 能 |néng|can / 说 |shuō|say / 两 |liǎng|two / 句 |jù|sentences / 中文 |Zhōng wén|Chinese / 。 }

I can only say a couple of sentences in Chinese.

Remember: 只 sits on the verb: 我只有一个 (“I only have one”), never 我有只有一个. English “only” wanders; Chinese 只 stays glued to the verb.

Watch out

- 只 (zhǐ, “only”) is written the same as 只 (zhī), the measure word for animals (一只猫) — same character, two readings and jobs.

Duration + 没 + 动词 + 了 — 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 + 没 + verb + 了. Compare the normal “did it for ten years” (verb first), and you’ll see the mirror image.

Structure: Subject + (已经 +) Duration + 没 + Verb + 了

{zh: 我们 |wǒ men|we / 已经 |yǐ jīng|already / 十年 |shí nián|ten years / 没 |méi|haven't / 见 |jiàn|met / 了 |le / 。 }

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

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 一个星期 |yí ge xīng qī|a week / 没 |méi|hasn't / 洗澡 |xǐ zǎo|showered / 了 |le / 。 }

He hasn't showered in a week.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 多久 |duō jiǔ|how long / 没 |méi|haven't / 回家 |huí jiā|been home / 了 |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. 看了十年 = “watched for ten years”; 十年没看了 = “haven’t watched in ten years.” The 了 here means “and counting.”

Watch out

- Chinese avoids “since [a time point].” Say a *duration* instead (三年没 ... 了), or 上次 ... 是 ... (“the last time was...”).

Time + 才 + 动词 — “not until” (lateness)

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

Structure: Subject + Time + 才 + Verb

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 昨天 |zuó tiān|yesterday / 十一点 |shí yī diǎn|eleven o'clock / 才 |cái|not until / 到家 |dào jiā|got home / 。 }

I didn't get home until eleven last night.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 二十五岁 |èr shí wǔ suì|twenty-five / 才 |cái|not until / 上 |shàng|started / 大学 |dà xué|university / 。 }

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

Remember: 才 = late / barely (就 = early / already). And 才 takes **no** 了 — the lateness is the point, not a completed result: 四十岁才结婚 ✓, never 才结婚了.

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).

先 ... , 再 ... — “first ..., then ...”

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

Structure: 先 + Verb 1 , 再 + Verb 2

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

Wash your hands first, then eat.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 要 |yào|should / 先 |xiān|first / 做 |zuò|do / 作业 |zuò yè|homework / , 再 |zài|then / 看 |kàn|watch / 电视 |diàn shì|TV / 。 }

Do your homework first, then watch TV.

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

Watch out

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

一边 ... 一边 ... — doing two things at once

Two deliberate actions happening **at the same time**? Frame both with 一边 ... 一边 ... — “(do X) while (doing Y).” 边 means “side,” so it’s literally “*on one side ... on the other side ...*” — two tracks running together.

Structure: Subject + 一边 + Verb 1 (,) 一边 + Verb 2

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 常常 |cháng cháng|often / 一边 |yì biān|while / 洗澡 |xǐ zǎo|showering / , 一边 |yì biān / 唱歌 |chàng gē|sing / 。 }

I often sing in the shower.

{zh: 别 |bié|don’t / 一边 |yì biān|while / 开车 |kāi chē|driving / , 一边 |yì biān / 打电话 |dǎ diàn huà|make calls / 。 }

Don’t make calls while driving.

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

Watch out

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

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

老是 — “always” (a complaint)

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

Structure: Subject + 老 (是) + Predicate

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 怎么 |zěnmě|why / 老是 |lǎoshì|always / 迟到 |chídào|late / ? }

Why are you always late?

{zh: 这个 |zhège|this / 机器 |jīqì|machine / 老是 |lǎoshì|always / 出 |chū|having / 问题 |wèntí|trouble / 。 }

This machine is always breaking down.

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

Watch out

- It’s a **complaint** — don’t use it for something good (use 总是 there).
- Before an adjective, add 不 / 很 / 这么: 老是不高兴.

才 + 数字 — “only” (a small number)

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

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

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 才 |cái|only / 二十岁 |èrshísuì|twenty / ? }

You’re only twenty?

{zh: 这家 |zhèjiā|this / 店 |diàn|shop / 才 |cái|only / 开业 |kāiyè|been open / 一个 |yíge|one / 星期 |xīngqī|week / 。 }

This shop has only been open a week.

{zh: 他们 |tāmen|they / 才 |cái|only / 认识 |rènshi|known each other / 三个月 |sān gè yuè|three months / ! }

They've only known each other three months!

Remember: one 才, 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 才 + verb, the 了 is optional: 才来了两个月 ≈ 才来两个月.