

Particles

Ref Hsk3 Grammar

动词 + 着 — an ongoing state

着 (zhe) after a verb freezes the action into a **lingering state** — the door *is* (standing) open, you *are* holding it. Think of 着 as a clip that keeps the verb “switched on.” A second, very common use is **Verb 1 + 着 + Verb 2**: V1 着 sets the posture or manner, and V2 is the real action done in that state.

Structure: Verb + 着 · Verb 1 + 着 + Verb 2

{zh: 你们 |nǐ men|you all / 坐 |zuò|sit / 着 |zhe / , 我 |wǒ|I / 马上 |mǎ shàng|right away / 回来 |huí lái|come back / 。 }

Stay seated — I'll be right back.

{zh: 她 |tā|she / 喜欢 |xǐ huan|likes to / 站 |zhàn|stand / 着 |zhe / 吃饭 |chī fàn|eat / 。 }

She likes to eat standing up.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 笑 |xiào|smiling / 着 |zhe / 说 |shuō|said / 对不起 |duì bu qǐ|sorry / 。 }

Smiling, he said sorry.

Remember: 着 = the verb **held on, lingering** (门开着 = “the door stays open”); for an action actively *in progress*, use 在 (他在吃饭). In V1 着 V2, V1 is the **backdrop**, V2 the **real action** — 站着吃 = “eat *while* standing.”

Watch out

- 着 is a state, not a play-by-play — pair it with 在/正在 only when you really mean “is currently ...”.

..... 了 — a change of state

Sentence-final 了 can announce a **new situation** — something has *become* the case that wasn't before. This “change” 了 (often called 了₂) is a different beast from the 了 that marks a *completed action*; here it means “**now**.”

Structure: Subject + Adjective + 了 · Subject + Verb + 了

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 饿 |è|hungry / 了 |le / 。 }

I'm hungry (now).

{zh: 下雨 |xià yǔ|raining / 了 |le / 。 }

It's raining (it wasn't before).

{zh: 宝宝 |bǎo bao|the baby / 会 |huì|can / 说话 |shuō huà|talk / 了 |le / 。 }

The baby can talk now.

Remember: this 了 = “**now, a new state**” (饿了 = “hungry *now*”), **not** “did and finished.” Whenever you’d add “now” in English, this is the 了 you want: 他当经理了 (“he’s a manager now”).

Watch out

- Same character, two jobs: change-of-state 了 (新情况) vs completed-action 了 (做完了). Context and position tell them apart.

..... 呢? — “and you? / what about ...?”

呢 at the end lobs a question **back** without you having to repeat it — “and ...? what about ...?” A neat extra: a bare noun + 呢 (with no prior question) asks “**where is ...?**”

Structure: Topic + 呢?

{zh: 我 |wǒ|I / 很 |hěn|very / 好 |hǎo|well / , 你 |nǐ|you / 呢 |ne / ? }

I'm well — and you?

{zh: 我 |wǒ|my / 的 |de / 手机 |shǒu jī|phone / 呢 |ne / ? }

Where's my phone?

Remember: 呢 = “...and X?” — it bounces the last question back (你呢? “and you?”). With nothing asked before, noun + 呢 means “**where is X?**” (钱呢? “where’s the money?”).

Watch out

- It rides on context — without a prior question or a “where is” sense, a bare 呢 has nothing to bounce off.

的 / 得 / 地 — the three structural “de”

Three different characters, all pronounced **de**, each with exactly one job. Keeping them straight is the single most common slip in written Chinese — so sort them by **what comes next**.

Structure: 的 + Noun · Verb + 得 + Complement · Adjective + 地 + Verb

{zh: 你 |nǐ|you / 做 |zuò|did / 得 |de / 很 |hěn|very / 好 |hǎo|well / , 因为 |yīn wèi|because / 你 |nǐ|you / 认真 |rèn zhēn|carefully / 地 |de / 听课 |tīng kè|listened / 。 }

You did well, because you listened attentively in class.

{zh: 妈妈 |mā ma|Mom / 的 |de / 新 |xīn|new / 手机 |shǒu jī|phone / 跑 |pǎo|runs / 得 |de / 特别 |tè bié|especially / 快 |kuài|fast / 。 }

Mom's new phone runs especially fast.

Remember: sort them by what **follows**: **的** → a **noun** (漂亮的衣服); **地** → a **verb**, building an adverb (认真地听); **得** → sits **after** a verb, rating the result (做得很好).
Tip: 地 has 土 “earth” (it *grounds* the verb); 得 leans on the verb to tell you *how well*.

Watch out

- A true adverb (不, 也, 都) needs **no** 地 — only an *adjective* used adverbially does (认真地, but just 都, never 都地).