Verb phrases

HSK 3 Grammar

Original teaching practice. Read one pattern, cover its model and try the questions before checking the separate answer section. Examples adapted from Chinese Grammar Wiki (AllSet Learning, CC BY-NC-SA) retain the course-reference provenance.

难 + Verb (unpleasant to ...)

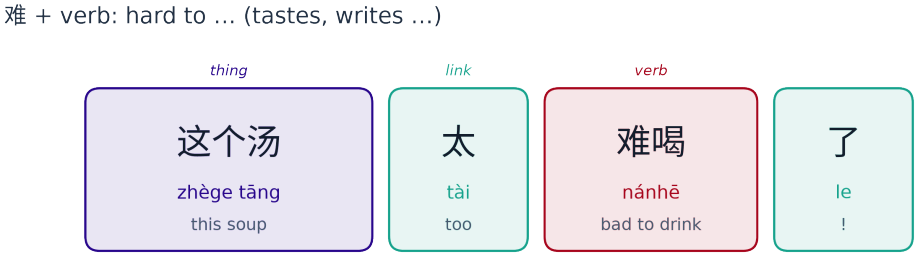
The canteen's new dish

- You try the canteen's new soup. It is salty and cold.
- **这个汤太难喝了！** – "This soup tastes awful!" 难 + a sense verb = unpleasant to ...

难 + sense verb

- **难吃, 难喝, 难看, 难听, 难闻** = bad-tasting (food), bad-tasting (drinks), ugly, unpleasant to hear, bad-smelling.
- They work like adjectives: 很难看, 太难听了. The opposites start with 好: 好吃, 好喝, 好看, 好听, 好闻.

这首歌很难听。
zhè shǒu gē hěn nán tīng
Word guide: 这 – this; 首 – (measure word); 歌 – song; 很 – very; 难听 – unpleasant to hear.



难 + other verbs: hard to ...

- With most other verbs, 难 means "difficult to": **这个字很难写。** – "This character is hard to write."
- **他的问题很难回答。** – "His question is hard to answer."

他的问题很难回答。
tā de wèn tí hěn nán huí dá
Word guide: 他 – his; 问题 – question; 很 – very; 难 – hard to; 回答 – answer.

■ Unpleasant versus difficult

- 难吃 means it tastes bad, not that it is hard to eat; 难看 means ugly, not hard to see.
- 难受 is a feeling: "feel unwell, upset": 我头疼，很难受.

■ 难 + Verb versus 不好 + Verb

- 不好吃 is milder: "not tasty". 难吃 is stronger: "awful".
- 不好写 (not easy to write) is similar to 很难写, but softer.

这个菜不好吃。
zhè ge cài bù hǎo chī
Word guide: 这 – this; 个 – (measure word); 菜 – dish; 不 – not; 好吃 – tasty.

■ Recap

- **难 + sense verb** (难吃, 难看, 难听, 难闻, 难喝) = unpleasant to that sense; opposite 好 + verb.
- **难 + other verbs** = hard to do: 难写, 难回答. 难受 = feel bad.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Verb + 了 + Duration (did for a length of time)

■ How long did you wait?

- Your friend was very late for lunch, and now she asks how long you waited.
- **我等了你一个小时！** – "I waited for you for an hour!"

■ Verb + 了 + Duration

- **Subject + Verb + 了 + duration** = did it for that long (finished): 我睡了八个小时, 他学了两年.
- The duration comes after the verb, as in English "slept eight hours". (In a negative such as 三天没吃肉了, the length of time comes first.)

我睡了八个小时。
wǒ shuì le bā gè xiǎo shí
Word guide: 我 – I; 睡 – sleep; 八个 – eight; 小时 – hours.

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Verb + 了 + time span: how long



With an object: two patterns

- Duration before the object noun: **他学了三年中文。** – "He studied Chinese for three years."
- Or repeat the verb: **他学中文学了三年。** A person object (你, 他) goes before the duration: 我等了你一个小时.

他学中文学了三年。
tā xué Zhōng wén xué le sān nián
Word guide: 他 – he; 学 – study; 中文 – Chinese; 学 – study; 三年 – three years.

Where the duration goes

- Duration after the verb: 我学了两年, not 我两年学了.
- With a noun object, do not put the duration last: 我学了两年中文 or 我学中文学了两年, not 我学了中文两年.

Finished, or still going?

- Verb + 了 + duration with no final 了 reports a finished period: 我在北京住了两年 – "I lived in Beijing for two years (then left)."
- Adding a final 了 says it is still going on; that pattern is the next lesson.

我在北京住了两年。
wǒ zài Běi jīng zhù le liǎng nián
Word guide: 我 – I; 在 – in; 北京 – Beijing; 住 – live; 两年 – two years.

Recap

- **Verb + 了 + duration** = did it for that long: 等了一个小时.
- With an object: 学了三年中文 or 学中文学了三年; a pronoun object comes before the duration: 等了你一个小时.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Verb + 了 + Duration + 了 (have been ...-ing)

Still waiting

- Your friend phones to ask where you are. You are still in the café where you have been since two o'clock.
- **我等了你两个小时了！** – "I've been waiting for you for two hours (and I'm still here)!"

Verb + 了 + Duration + 了

- **The final 了** says the period lasts up to now and may continue: 我学了三年中文了 – "I've been studying Chinese for three years."
- Without it, the period is over: 我学了三年中文 – "I studied Chinese for three years."

我学了三年中文了。
wǒ xué le sān nián Zhōng wén le
Word guide: 我 – I; 学 – study; 三年 – three years; 中文 – Chinese.



How long so far

- **他在这儿工作了十年了。** – "He has worked here for ten years (and still does)."
- Asking: **你学中文学了多长时间了?** – "How long have you been learning Chinese?"

他在这儿工作了十年了。
tā zài zhèr gōng zuò le shí nián le
Word guide: 他 – he; 在 – at; 这儿 – here; 工作 – work; 十年 – ten years.

One 了 or two

- Two 了 = still going: 住了两年了 (I still live here). One 了 = finished: 住了两年 (I moved away).
- The duration still goes after the verb: 学了三年了, not 三年学了了.

With 已经

- 已经 often comes in front to stress the length: **我已经等了一个小时了。** – "I've already been waiting an hour."
- The meaning of the two 了 does not change; 已经 just adds emphasis.

我已经等了一个小时了。
wǒ yǐ jīng děng le yí gè xiǎo shí le
Word guide: 我 – I; 已经 – already; 等 – wait; 一个 – one; 小时 – hour.

Recap

- **Verb + 了 + duration + 了** = have been doing it for that long, up to now.
- One 了 = a finished period; two 了 = still going. 已经 adds emphasis.

Practise this pattern step by step.

没办法 + Verb (no way to / can't)

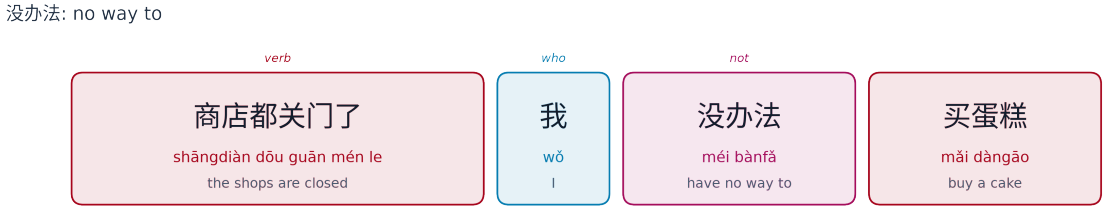
The shop is closed

- Your friend asks you to buy a cake on the way home, but every bakery has closed for the holiday.
- **商店都关门了，我没办法买蛋糕。** – "The shops are all shut; there's no way I can buy a cake."

Subject + 没办法 + Verb

- **没办法 + Verb** = "there's no way to …, can't (because the situation does not allow it)".
- It goes before the verb phrase: 我没办法帮你, 他没办法来.

对不起，我没办法帮你。
duì bu qǐ wǒ méi bàn fǎ bāng nǐ
Word guide: 对不起 – sorry; 我 – I; 没办法 – have no way to; 帮 – help; 你 – you.



■ **On its own: "nothing can be done"**

- As a short reply: A: 下雨了，比赛取消了。B: **没办法。** – "Oh well, nothing we can do."
- With 一点儿 for emphasis: **我一点儿办法都没有。** – "I'm completely out of ideas."

我一点儿办法都没有。
wǒ yì diǎnr bàn fǎ dōu méi yǒu
Word guide: 我 – I; 一点儿 – a bit; 办法 – way; 都 – (at all); 没有 – have not.

■ **Circumstances, not skill**

- 没办法 means the situation blocks you; for a skill you lack, use 不会: 我不会游泳.
- Keep 没 (not 不): 没办法, not 不办法.

■ **没办法 versus 不能**

- 不能 is the general "can't / not allowed": 这里不能抽烟 – "You can't smoke here."
- 没办法 suggests you have tried or thought about it and found no way: 我没办法联系他 – "I have no way of contacting him."

我没办法联系他。
wǒ méi bàn fǎ lián xì tā
Word guide: 我 – I; 没办法 – have no way to; 联系 – contact; 他 – him.

■ **Recap**

- **没办法 + Verb** = there's no way to …, the situation does not allow it.
- Alone, 没办法 = "nothing can be done". A missing skill is 不会; a rule is 不能.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Verb reduplication (do a bit / give it a try)

■ **Can I try it on?**

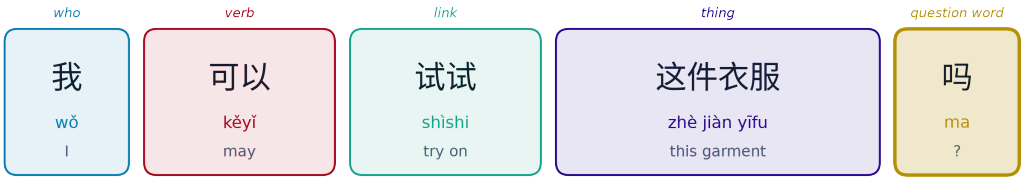
- You see a jacket you like in a shop and want to try it before deciding.
- **我可以试试这件衣服吗?** – "Can I try on this jacket?" Doubling the verb makes it light and casual.

■ **One-syllable verbs: VV, V 一 V**

- **V + V** or **V + 一 + V** = do it a little, give it a try: 看看 / 看一看, 尝尝 / 尝一尝.
- The second syllable is said lightly. The effect is softer and friendlier than the bare verb.

你尝一尝这个菜。
nǐ cháng yi chang zhè ge cài
Word guide: 你 – you; 尝 – taste; 一 – (a bit); 尝 – taste; 这个 – this; 菜 – dish.

A doubled verb: try a little



Two-syllable verbs: ABAB

- A two-syllable verb doubles as a whole: 休息 → **休息休息**, 介绍 → **介绍介绍**, 讨论 → **讨论讨论**.
- **我们讨论讨论这个问题吧。** – "Let's talk this over a bit."

你累了，休息休息吧。
nǐ lèi le xiū xi xiū xi ba
Word guide: 你 – you; 累 – tired; 休息 – rest; 休息 – rest.

Verbs ABAB, adjectives AABB

- Two-syllable verbs repeat as ABAB (休息休息), not AABB (休休息息); AABB is for adjectives (干干净净).
- Doubling adds "a bit", so do not add a duration as well: 看看, or 看一会儿, not 看看一会儿.

Past tense: V 了 V

- For a short completed action, put 了 in the middle: **他看了看表，就走了。** – "He glanced at his watch and left."
- Two-syllable verbs rarely take 了 inside; use the plain verb + 了 + 一下: 我们讨论了一下.

他看了看表，就走了。
tā kàn le kan biǎo jiù zǒu le
Word guide: 他 – he; 看 – look; 看 – look; 表 – watch; 就 – then; 走 – leave.

Recap

- **VV / V 一 V** (看看, 看一看) and **ABAB** (休息休息) = do a bit, give it a try; softer and casual.
- Completed: **V 了 V** (看了看). Adjectives double as AABB, verbs as ABAB.

Practise this pattern step by step.

很 + Verb (feeling verbs with 很)

How much do you like it?

- A new friend asks whether you like Chinese food. You really do.
- **我很喜欢吃中国菜。** – "I really like Chinese food."

很 + feeling verb

- Verbs of feeling and wanting take degree words just like adjectives: **很喜欢**, **很想**, **很担心**, **很希望**, **很爱**.
- 很 goes right before the verb: 我很想家 – "I miss home very much."

我很想家。
wǒ hěn xiǎng jiā
Word guide: 我 – I; 很 – very much; 想 – miss; 家 – home.

很 / 非常 + feeling verb: how much



Other degree words work too

- **我非常担心他。** – "I'm extremely worried about him."
- **我们都很希望你能来。** – "We all very much hope you can come."

我们都很希望你能来。
wǒ men dōu hěn xī wàng nǐ néng lái
Word guide: 我们 – we; 都 – all; 很 – very much; 希望 – hope; 你 – you; 能 – can; 来 – come.

Feeling verbs only

- Ordinary action verbs do not take 很: 很吃, 很跑, 很去 are wrong. Say 吃得很多, 跑得很快.
- Put 很 before the verb, not the object: 很喜欢这本书, not 喜欢很这本书.

■ 很想 + Verb = really want to

- 想 + another verb means "want to"; 很想 strengthens it: **我很想去看看。** – "I'd really like to go and have a look."
- 很会 + Verb = "be good at": 他很会做饭 – "He's a great cook."

他很会做饭。
tā hěn huì zuò fàn
Word guide: 他 – he; 很 – very; 会 – good at; 做饭 – cooking.

■ Recap

- **很 + feeling verb** (喜欢, 想, 担心, 希望, 爱) = like / want / worry … very much.
- Action verbs do not take 很; use a 得 complement instead. 很会 = good at.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 难 + Verb (unpleasant to …)

0305.1 Complete: "This colour is ugly." 这个颜色很 ……。

0305.2 Match each word to its meaning.

- 1. 难吃
- 1. 难听
- 1. 难写
- 1. 难受
- A. sounds unpleasant
- B. hard to write
- C. feel unwell
- D. tastes bad

0305.3 Which is the mildest way to say the food is not good?

- A. 不好吃。
- B. 太难吃了。
- C. 难吃极了。
- D. 很难吃。

0305.4 Build: "His question is hard to answer."

Arrange all chunks: 很 / 回答。/ 他的问题 / 难

0305.5 You try the canteen's new soup. It is salty and cold. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ Verb + 了 + Duration (did for a length of time)

0306.1 Complete: “I slept for ten hours yesterday.” 我昨天睡 …… 十个小时。

0306.2 Which says “She studied piano for five years.”?

- A. 她学钢琴五年了学。
- B. 她学了钢琴五年。
- C. 她五年学了钢琴。
- D. 她学了五年钢琴。

0306.3 Build: “I waited for you for an hour.”

Arrange all chunks: 我 / 等了 / 一个小时。/ 你

0306.4 我在北京住了两年 can describe a stay that has ended.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0306.5 Your friend was very late for lunch, and now she asks how long you waited. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ Verb + 了 + Duration + 了 (have been ...-ing)

0307.1 You still live here: “I’ve lived here for five years.” 我在这儿住了五年 ……。

0307.2 Which sentence means the person still works at the bank?

- A. 他三年在银行工作。
- B. 他在银行工作了三年了。
- C. 他在银行三年工作了。
- D. 他在银行工作了三年。

0307.3 Build: “I’ve already been waiting for an hour.”

Arrange all chunks: 等了 / 一个小时了。/ 已经 / 我

0307.4 我学了三年中文 and 我学了三年中文了 mean exactly the same.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0307.5 Your friend phones to ask where you are. You are still in the café where you have been since two o’clock. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ 没办法 + Verb (no way to / can't)

0308.1 Complete: "The phone has no signal; I can't call you." 手机没有信号，我 …… 给你打电话。

0308.2 Which says "I can't swim (I never learned)."?

- A. 我游泳没办法。
- B. 我不办法游泳。
- C. 我没办法游泳。
- D. 我不会游泳。

0308.3 Build: "Sorry, there's no way I can help you."

Arrange all chunks: ， 我 / 没办法 / 对不起 / 帮你。

0308.4 没办法 can be a complete reply meaning "nothing can be done".

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0308.5 Your friend asks you to buy a cake on the way home, but every bakery has closed for the holiday. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ Verb reduplication (do a bit / give it a try)

0309.1 Double the verb 看 to say "Let me have a look." 让我 ……。

0309.2 Which is the correct doubled form of 休息?

- A. 休息息
- B. 休休息息
- C. 休息休息
- D. 休休息

0309.3 Build: "He glanced at his watch and left."

Arrange all chunks: ， 就 / 看了看表 / 他 / 走了。

0309.4 你尝尝 sounds softer than 你尝.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0309.5 You see a jacket you like in a shop and want to try it before deciding. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson's pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

■ 很 + Verb (feeling verbs with 很)

0310.1 Complete: “I miss my mum very much.” 我 …… 想我妈妈。

0310.2 Which sentence is correct?

- A. 他很喜欢米饭。
- B. 他很吃米饭。
- C. 他米饭很喜欢吃很。
- D. 他喜欢很米饭。

0310.3 Build: “We all very much hope you can come.”

Arrange all chunks: 很希望 / 你 / 能来。/ 我们都

0310.4 他很会做饭 means “He is very good at cooking.”

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0310.5 A new friend asks whether you like Chinese food. You really do. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

Answers and explanations

■ 难 + Verb (unpleasant to ...)

0305.1 难看

难看 = unpleasant to look at, ugly.

0305.2 1–D: 难吃 = tastes bad; 2–A: 难听 = sounds unpleasant; 3–B: 难写 = hard to write; 4–C: 难受 = feel unwell

With sense verbs 难 means unpleasant; with other verbs it means hard to do; 难受 is a feeling.

0305.3 A. 不好吃。

不好吃 is milder than 难吃.

0305.4 他的问题很难回答。

Topic + 很 + 难 + verb.

0305.5 One possible response: 这个汤太难喝了!

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 难吃 means it tastes bad, not that it is hard to eat; 难看 means ugly, not hard to see.
- 难受 is a feeling: "feel unwell, upset": 我头疼，很难受.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ Verb + 了 + Duration (did for a length of time)

0306.1 了

Verb + 了 + duration.

0306.2 D. 她学了五年钢琴。

The duration goes between 了 and the noun object.

0306.3 我等了你一个小时。

A pronoun object comes before the duration.

0306.4 True.

With no final 了, the period is reported as complete.

0306.5 One possible response: 我等了你一个小时!

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.

- Duration after the verb: 我学了两年, not 我两年学了.
- With a noun object, do not put the duration last: 我学了两年中文 or 我学中文学了两年, not 我学了中文两年.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ Verb + 了 + Duration + 了 (have been ...-ing)

0307.1 了

The final 了 shows it continues up to now.

0307.2 B. 他在银行工作了三年了。

Two 了 = still going.

0307.3 我已经等了一个小时了。

已经 + verb + 了 + duration + 了.

0307.4 False.

The first is a finished period; the second continues up to now.

0307.5 One possible response: 我等了你两个小时了!

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Two 了 = still going: 住了两年了 (I still live here). One 了 = finished: 住了两年 (I moved away).
- The duration still goes after the verb: 学了三年了, not 三年学了了.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ 没办法 + Verb (no way to / can't)

0308.1 没办法

The situation blocks the call, so 没办法 + verb.

0308.2 D. 我不会游泳。

A skill you have not learned takes 不会.

0308.3 对不起，我没办法帮你。

Subject + 没办法 + verb phrase.

0308.4 True.

It is a common short reply when a situation cannot be changed.

0308.5 One possible response: 商店都关门了，我没办法买蛋糕。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 没办法 means the situation blocks you; for a skill you lack, use 不会: 我不会游泳.
- Keep 没 (not 不): 没办法, not 不办法.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ Verb reduplication (do a bit / give it a try)

0309.1 看看

VV or V 一 V makes it a light "have a look".

0309.2 C. 休息休息

Two-syllable verbs repeat as ABAB.

0309.3 他看了看表，就走了。

V 了 V for a brief completed action.

0309.4 True.

Doubling makes an invitation light and friendly.

0309.5 One possible response: 我可以试试这件衣服吗?

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Two-syllable verbs repeat as ABAB (休息休息), not AABB (休休息息); AABB is for adjectives (干干净净).
- Doubling adds "a bit", so do not add a duration as well: 看看, or 看一会儿, not 看看一会儿.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.

■ 很 + Verb (feeling verbs with 很)

0310.1 很

Feeling verbs such as 想 take 很.

0310.2 A. 他很喜欢米饭。

很 + feeling verb is correct; an action verb such as 吃 does not take 很.

0310.3 我们都很希望你能来。

都 + 很 + feeling verb + clause.

0310.4 True.

很会 + verb = be good at doing it.

0310.5 One possible response: 我很喜欢吃中国菜。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.
- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- Ordinary action verbs do not take 很: 很吃, 很跑, 很去 are wrong. Say 吃得很多, 跑得很快.
- Put 很 before the verb, not the object: 很喜欢这本书, not 喜欢很这本书.
- I tried a second response with a name, time, place, or description changed.

This is supported productive practice. Compare meaning and structure; your answer need not copy the model. A partner or teacher must hear the spoken response to comment on pronunciation.