Comparing similar adverbs

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.

才 vs 就 (late vs early)

Same time, different reactions

- The meeting starts at nine. Li arrived at 8:30; Wang strolled in at 9:30.
- **小李八点半就到了，小王九点半才到。** – "Li was there as early as 8:30; Wang didn't arrive until 9:30."

Time + 就 + Verb + 了 versus Time + 才 + Verb

- **就** = earlier, sooner or easier than expected; the sentence usually has 了: 他六点就起床了.
- **才** = later or harder than expected: 他九点才起床 is the short model used here. Other contexts can also include 了.

他六点就起床了。
tā liù diǎn jiù qǐ chuáng le
Word guide: 他 – he; 六点 – six o'clock; 就 – already; 起床 – get up.



It depends on the expectation

- A child getting up at seven for school: **他七点就起床了** if you expected eight.
- The same seven o'clock for a farmer who usually rises at five: **他七点才起床。**

他九点才起床。
tā jiǔ diǎn cái qǐ chuáng
Word guide: 他 – he; 九点 – nine o'clock; 才 – not until; 起床 – get up.

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The 了 rule

- 就 sentences about the past normally take 了: 他八点就到了.
- Use 他十点才到 as the simple late-arrival model. This is not a ban on 了 in every sentence containing 才.

With amounts and effort too

- 就 = little effort needed: **他看了一遍就懂了。** – "He understood after reading it once."
- 才 = a lot of effort needed: **我看了三遍才懂。** – "I only understood after reading it three times."

我看了三遍才懂。
wǒ kàn le sān biàn cái dǒng
Word guide: 我 – I; 看 – read; 三遍 – three times; 才 – only then; 懂 – understand.

Recap

- **就** can present an event as early, quick or easy; **才** as late, slow or hard. Aspect marking depends on the complete sentence.
- The choice depends on the speaker's expectation, not on the clock alone.

Practise this pattern step by step.

刚 vs 刚才 (just now: adverb vs time-word)

You only just missed her

- You knock on your friend's door; her roommate says she left a few minutes ago.
- **她刚才出去了。** – "She went out a moment ago." 刚才 is a time word for "just now".

刚 is an adverb, 刚才 is a time word

- **刚 + Verb** = "have just (done)"; it goes right before the verb: 我刚到 – "I've just arrived."
- **刚才** = "a moment ago"; like 昨天, it can start the sentence: 刚才你去哪儿了?

我刚到家。
wǒ gāng dào jiā
Word guide: 我 – I; 刚 – just; 到 – arrive; 家 – home.

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刚才: a moment ago (a time word)



How recent is "just"?

- 刚 can stretch: **他刚来北京一个月。** – "He's only been in Beijing a month." It is recent from the speaker's view.
- 刚才 is only a few minutes ago: 刚才有人给你打电话。– "Someone called you just now."

刚才有人给你打电话。
gāng cái yǒu rén gěi nǐ dǎ diàn huà
Word guide: 刚才 – just now; 有 – there was; 人 – someone; 给 – to; 你 – you; 打 – make; 电话 – a phone call.

Position and 了

- 刚 never starts the sentence: 我刚吃饭, not 刚我吃饭. 刚才 may come first: 刚才我吃饭了.
- 刚 + verb usually has no 了: 我刚到. 刚才 sentences take 了 normally: 他刚才走了.

刚才 can describe a past state

- 刚才 works with adjectives and negatives: **刚才很热，现在好多了。** – "It was hot just now; now it's much better."
- 刚 does not: you cannot say 刚很热. Use 刚才.

刚才很热，现在好多了。
gāng cái hěn rè xiàn zài hǎo duō le
Word guide: 刚才 – just now; 很 – very; 热 – hot; 现在 – now; 好 – better; 多 – much.

Recap

- **刚 + Verb** = have just done (adverb, before the verb, usually no 了).
- **刚才** = a moment ago (time word, can start the sentence, works with 了, adjectives and 没).

Practise this pattern step by step.

有点 vs 一点 (a bit too... vs a little ...er)

Trying on shoes

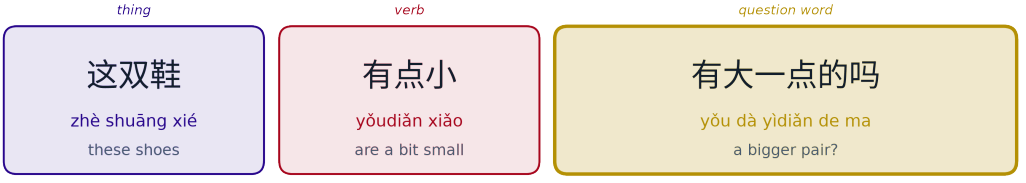
- The shoes fit badly and you want to ask for another size.
- **这双鞋有点小，有大一点的吗？** – "These shoes are a bit small. Do you have a slightly bigger pair?"

有点 + Adj before, Adj + 一点 after

- **有点 (儿) + Adj** = "a bit (too) …", usually a complaint: 有点贵, 有点冷.
- **Adj + 一点 (儿)** = "a little more …", for comparing or asking: 便宜一点, 快一点.

今天有点冷。
jīn tiān yǒu diǎn lěng
Word guide: 今天 – today; 有点 – a bit; 冷 – cold.

有点 complains; adjective + 一点 asks for a change



Complain, then request

- Bargaining: **这个有点贵，能便宜一点吗？** – "It's a bit expensive; can you make it a little cheaper?"
- Asking for change: **你说得有点快，请说慢一点。** – "You speak a bit fast; please speak a little slower."

请说慢一点。
qǐng shuō màn yì diǎn
Word guide: 请 – please; 说 – speak; 慢 – slow; 一点 – a little.

Keep them on the right side

- 有点 goes before the adjective: 有点贵, not 贵有点.
- 一点 goes after the adjective: 便宜一点, not 一点便宜 (一点 before a noun means "a little of": 一点水).

■ 有点 sounds negative

- 有点 + a pleasant word sounds odd: 有点漂亮 is unusual. Use 很漂亮 or 比较漂亮.
- 有点 + negative adjectives is natural: 有点累, 有点难, 有点不舒服.

我有点不舒服。
wǒ yǒu diǎn bù shū fu
Word guide: 我 – I; 有点 – a bit; 不 – not; 舒服 – well.

■ Recap

- **有点 + Adj** = a bit too … (a complaint); **Adj + 一点** = a little more … (comparison or request).
- Typical pair: 有点贵，便宜一点吧.

Practise this pattern step by step.

再 vs 又 (again: future vs past)

■ Again: done or still to come?

- You visited the Great Wall last year. This year you went again, and next year you want to go once more.
- **我今年又去了长城，明年还想再去。** – "I went to the Great Wall again this year, and I want to go again next year."

■ 又 for the past, 再 for the future

- **又 + Verb + 了** = it happened again (already): 他又迟到了.
- **再 + Verb** = do it again (still to come), in plans, requests and suggestions: 请再说一遍.

请再说一遍。
qǐng zài shuō yí biàn
Word guide: 请 – please; 再 – again; 说 – say; 一遍 – once.

又: again (done) · 再: again (still to come)



■ Requests and plans

- **欢迎你下次再来！** – "Come again next time!"
- **我们明天再讨论吧。** – "Let's discuss it again tomorrow." 再 can also mean "then, later".

欢迎你下次再来！
huān yíng nǐ xià cì zài lái
Word guide: 欢迎 – welcome; 你 – you; 下次 – next time; 再 – again; 来 – come.

■ Picking the right "again"

- Past repetition: 又, not 再: 他昨天又来了, not 他昨天再来了.
- Future plan or request: 再, not 又: 明天再来, not 明天又来 (unless it is a predictable repeat).

■ The exception: certain repeats

- 又 can look ahead for something sure to come round again: **明天又是周末了！** – "It's the weekend again tomorrow!"
- 还想再 / 还要再 shows a wish to repeat: 我还想再吃一碗 – "I'd like another bowl."

我还想再吃一碗。
wǒ hái xiǎng zài chī yì wǎn
Word guide: 我 – I; 还 – still; 想 – want; 再 – again; 吃 – eat; 一碗 – a bowl.

■ Recap

- **又** = again, already happened (又 + V + 了). **再** = again, still to come (plans, requests).
- 又 can look ahead only for a certain repeat (又是周末了).

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 才 vs 就 (late vs early)

0213.1 The train was due at ten but arrived at eleven. 火车十一点 …… 到。

0213.2 Which reports arrival as early in the completed-event model used here?

- A. 他七点到了就。
- B. 他才十点到了。
- C. 他十点才到了。
- D. 他七点就到了。

0213.3 "I asked three times before he agreed." Which word fits? 我问了三次他 _____ 同意。

- A. 又
- B. 才
- C. 就
- D. 再

0213.4 Build: “He got up as early as six.”

Arrange all chunks: 他 / 就 / 起床了。/ 六点

0213.5 The meeting starts at nine. Li arrived at 8:30; Wang strolled in at 9:30. 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.

■ 刚 vs 刚才 (just now: adverb vs time-word)

0214.1 Complete: “What did you say just now?” …… 你说什么?

0214.2 Which sentence is correct?

- A. 刚我到家。
- B. 我到家刚。
- C. 我刚到家。
- D. 刚很冷。

0214.3 刚才很忙 is correct, but 刚很忙 is not.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0214.4 Build: “Someone called you just now.”

Arrange all chunks: 刚才 / 给你 / 有人 / 打电话。

0214.5 You knock on your friend’s door; her roommate says she left a few minutes ago. 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.

■ 有点 vs 一点 (a bit too... vs a little ...er)

0215.1 Complain: “The soup is a bit salty.” 汤 …… 咸。

0215.2 Ask for change: “Could you walk a little faster?”

- A. 你能一点快走吗?
- B. 你能走有点快吗?
- C. 你能走快一点吗?
- D. 你能有点快走吗?

0215.3 Build: “It’s a bit expensive; can you make it a little cheaper?”

Arrange all chunks: 能便宜 / 一点吗? / 这个有点贵 / ,

0215.4 她有点漂亮 is a natural compliment.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0215.5 The shoes fit badly and you want to ask for another size. 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.

■ 再 vs 又 (again: future vs past)

0216.1 Ask politely: "Please try again." 请 …… 试一次。

0216.2 Fill both gaps: 他上个星期 ___ 感冒了，医生说下个月 ___ 来检查。

- A. 再 … 再
- B. 又 … 又
- C. 再 … 又
- D. 又 … 再

0216.3 Build: "Come again next time!"

Arrange all chunks: 下次 / 再 / 欢迎你 / 来！

0216.4 明天又是星期五了 is correct.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0216.5 You visited the Great Wall last year. This year you went again, and next year you want to go once more. 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

■ 才 vs 就 (late vs early)

0213.1 才

Eleven is later than the expected ten, so use 才.

0213.2 D. 他七点就到了。

他七点就到了 presents seven as early. 才 would express the opposite expectation; 了 is not universally banned after 才.

0213.3 B. 才

Three requests means more effort than expected, so 才.

0213.4 他六点就起床了。

Time + 就 + Verb + 了.

0213.5 One possible response: 小李八点半就到了，小王九点半才到。

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.
- 就 sentences about the past normally take 了: 他八点就到了.
- Use 他十点才到 as the simple late-arrival model. This is not a ban on 了 in every sentence containing 才.
- 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.

■ 刚 vs 刚才 (just now: adverb vs time-word)

0214.1 刚才

Only the time word 刚才 can start the sentence.

0214.2 C. 我刚到家。

刚 stands right before the verb; it cannot start the sentence, and it is not used for a past state like 很忙.

0214.3 True.

刚才 can describe a state a moment ago; 刚 usually goes before a verb and is not used for a past state like 很忙.

0214.4 刚才有人给你打电话。

刚才 + 有人 + 给 + person + 打电话.

0214.5 One possible response: 她刚才出去了。

Check meaning and form:

- My response conveys a message that fits the opening situation.

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- I can explain the meaning of the pattern, rather than only naming it.
- 刚 never starts the sentence: 我刚吃饭, not 刚我吃饭. 刚才 may come first: 刚才我吃饭了.
- 刚 + verb usually has no 了: 我刚到. 刚才 sentences take 了 normally: 他刚才走了.
- 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.

■ 有点 vs 一点 (a bit too... vs a little ...er)

0215.1 有点

有点 + Adj for something slightly unwelcome.

0215.2 C. 你能走快一点吗?

Verb + Adj + 一点 asks for "a little more …".

0215.3 这个有点贵，能便宜一点吗?

有点 + Adj (complaint), then Adj + 一点 (request).

0215.4 False.

有点 usually goes with unwelcome qualities. Say 她很漂亮.

0215.5 One possible response: 这双鞋有点小，有大一点的吗?

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.
- 有点 goes before the adjective: 有点贵, not 贵有点.
- 一点 goes after the adjective: 便宜一点, not 一点便宜 (一点 before a noun means "a little of": 一点水).
- 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.

■ 再 vs 又 (again: future vs past)

0216.1 再

A request for a future repeat takes 再.

0216.2 D. 又 … 再

The cold already came back (又); the check-up is still to come (再).

0216.3 欢迎你下次再来!

Time word + 再 + verb for a future repeat.

0216.4 True.

又 can look ahead for a repeat that is certain to come.

0216.5 One possible response: 我今年又去了长城，明年还想再去。

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.
- Past repetition: 又, not 再: 他昨天又来了, not 他昨天再来了.
- Future plan or request: 再, not 又: 明天再来, not 明天又来 (unless it is a predictable repeat).
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