Comparing similar conjunctions

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.

还是 vs 或者 (or: question vs statement)

Asking or offering?

- A waiter asks, “Rice or noodles?” You answer, “Either is fine.”
- **米饭还是面条？ — 米饭或者面条都可以。** – “Rice or noodles? – Rice or noodles, either is fine.”

还是 asks, 或者 states

- **还是** = “or” in a question that asks someone to choose: 你喝茶还是咖啡?
- **或者** = “or” in a statement or suggestion: 你可以喝茶或者咖啡.

你可以喝茶或者咖啡。
nǐ kě yǐ hē chá huò zhě kā fēi
Word guide: 你 – you; 可以 – can; 喝 – drink; 茶 – tea; 或者 – or; 咖啡 – coffee.



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■ Hidden questions

- After 不知道, 想知道 or 决定, use 还是: **我不知道他去还是不去。** – "I don't know whether he's going or not."
- **我还没决定去北京还是去上海。** – "I haven't decided whether to go to Beijing or Shanghai."

我还没决定去北京还是去上海。
wǒ hái méi jué dìng qù Běi jīng hái shi qù Shàng hǎi
Word guide: 我 – I; 还 – still; 没 – haven't; 决定 – decided; 去 – go to; 北京 – Beijing; 还是 – or; 去 – go to; 上海 – Shanghai.

■ The quick test

- Is someone being asked to choose (even indirectly)? Use 还是. Is a possibility being offered? Use 或者.
- Never add 吗 to a 还是 question: 你去还是不去？, not 你去还是不去吗?

■ 还是 = had better

- 还是 also means "had better", with no choice involved: **太晚了，我们还是回家吧。** – "It's late; we'd better go home."
- Read the context: two options to choose from, or a recommendation?

太晚了，我们还是回家吧。
tài wǎn le wǒ men hái shi huí jiā ba
Word guide: 太 – too; 晚 – late; 我们 – we; 还是 – had better; 回家 – go home.

■ Recap

- **还是** = or in direct and hidden questions (不知道 A 还是 B); **或者** = or in statements.
- 还是 + suggestion = had better.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 还是 vs 或者 (or: question vs statement)

0715.1 Suggest: "We can take the bus or walk." 我们可以坐公交车 …… 走路。

0715.2 Which fits? 我不知道他是老师 _____ 学生。

- A. 和
- B. 而且
- C. 还是
- D. 或者

0715.3 Match each sentence to what 还是 / 或者 does.

- 1. 你去还是我去?
- 1. 你去或者我去都行。
- 1. 我们还是走吧。
- A. asks someone to choose
- B. had better
- C. offers either option

0715.4 你去还是不去吗? is correct.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

0715.5 A waiter asks, “Rice or noodles?” You answer, “Either is fine.” 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

■ 还是 vs 或者 (or: question vs statement)

0715.1 或者

A statement offering options uses 或者.

0715.2 C. 还是

After 不知道, the hidden question takes 还是.

0715.3 1–A: 你去还是我去？ = asks someone to choose; 2–C: 你去或者我去都行。= offers either option; 3–B: 我们还是走吧。= had better

还是 asks or recommends; 或者 states options.

0715.4 False.

A 还是 question takes no 吗.

0715.5 One possible response: 米饭还是面条？— 米饭或者面条都可以。

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.
- Is someone being asked to choose (even indirectly)? Use 还是. Is a possibility being offered? Use 或者.
- Never add 吗 to a 还是 question: 你去还是不去？, not 你去还是不去吗?
- 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.