Comparing similar time words

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.

以后 vs 然后 vs 后来 (then / after)

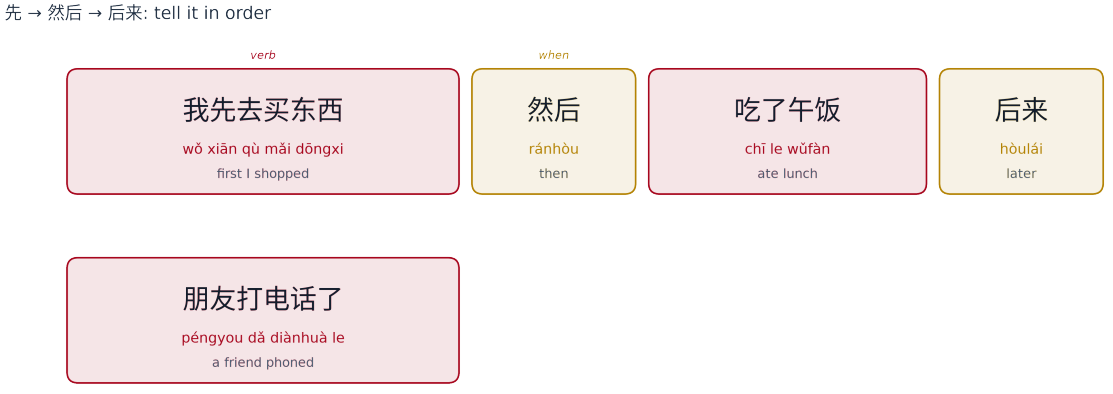
Telling your day in order

- You describe last Saturday: shopping, then lunch, and much later a surprise phone call.
- **我先去买东西，然后吃了午饭。后来，我的老朋友给我打电话了。** – "First I went shopping, then I had lunch. Later on, an old friend phoned me."

Three words for "after"

- **以后** follows an event (吃饭以后) or, alone, means "in the future" (以后再说).
- **然后** links the next step, in the past or future (先洗手，然后吃饭). **后来** jumps forward in a past story only.

先洗手，然后吃饭。
xiān xǐ shǒu rán hòu chī fàn
Word guide: 先 – first; 洗手 – wash hands; 然后 – then; 吃饭 – eat.



Choosing by the situation

- Plan: **我们先吃饭，然后去看电影。** – "Let's eat first, then see a film." (以后 / 然后, not 后来)
- Story: **我们是大学同学，后来结婚了。** – "We were classmates at university, and later we got married."

我们是大学同学，后来结婚了。
wǒ men shì dà xué tóng xué hòu lái jié hūn le
Word guide: 我们 – we; 是 – were; 大学 – university; 同学 – classmates; 后来 – later; 结婚 – marry.

■ Two common slips

- 后来 is never for the future: 我们以后再见, not 我们后来再见.
- 后来 is never added after an event: 下课以后, not 下课后来.

■ 以后 after a clause

- **我到了以后给你打电话。** – "I'll call you after I arrive."
- 然后 cannot do this job: it starts the next clause instead: 我到了，然后给你打电话。

我到了以后给你打电话。
wǒ dào le yǐ hòu gěi nǐ dǎ diàn huà
Word guide: 我 – I; 到 – arrive; 以后 – after; 给 – to; 你 – you; 打 – make; 电话 – a call.

■ Recap

- **以后** = after X / in the future; **然后** = and then (next step, any time); **后来** = later on (past stories only).
- Plans use 然后 or 以后, never 后来.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 以后 vs 然后 vs 后来 (then / after)

0517.1 A recipe: "Wash the vegetables, then cut them." 先洗菜，…… 切菜。

0517.2 Which says "See you again some time" (in the future)?

- A. 我们再见后来。
- B. 我们后来再见。
- C. 我们然后见以后。
- D. 我们以后再见。

0517.3 Match each word to its use.

- 1. 以后
- 1. 然后
- 1. 后来
- A. the next step
- B. later on in a past story

- C. after an event / in the future

0517.4 Build: “I’ll call you after I arrive.”

Arrange all chunks: 到了以后 / 打电话。/ 给你 / 我

0517.5 You describe last Saturday: shopping, then lunch, and much later a surprise phone call. 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

■ 以后 vs 然后 vs 后来 (then / after)

0517.1 然后

然后 links the next step.

0517.2 D. 我们以后再见。

后来 is only for past stories; 以后 can refer to the future.

0517.3 1–C: 以后 = after an event / in the future; 2–A: 然后 = the next step; 3–B: 后来 = later on in a past story

Each "after" word has its own job.

0517.4 我到了以后给你打电话。

Clause + 以后 + main clause.

0517.5 One possible response: 我先去买东西，然后吃了午饭。后来，我的老朋友给我打电话了。

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.
- 后来 is never for the future: 我们以后再见, not 我们后来再见.
- 后来 is never added after an event: 下课以后, not 下课后来.
- 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.