

Adverbs

Ref Hsk4 Grammar

— “about the same, more or less”

Read literally and it explains itself: (difference) + (not) + (much) = “not much difference.” Hence “about the same, more or less, almost.” It can stand alone as a predicate, link two things (A B), or work as an adverb before a quantity.

Structure: Subject + · A + / + B +

{zh: |zhè|these / |liǎng ge|two / |cí|words / |de / |yì si|meanings / |chà bu duō|about the same / 。 }

These two words mean about the same thing.

{zh: |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / |hé|and / |Niū yuē|New York / |chà bu duō|much the same / 。 }

Shanghai and New York are much the same.

Remember: (difference) (not) (much) — “not much off.” Decode the three characters and the meaning (“about the same / almost there”) falls out for free.

Watch out

- As an adverb it also means “almost (there)”: (“that’s about enough”), (“around ten”).
- For several items, add : .

— “it seems, apparently”

offers up the speaker’s **read of a situation** — “it seems, apparently.” Use + person + for “in someone’s view.” The pitfall is confusing it with (“it *looks* like” from physical appearance): is a *judgement in your head*, is *what your eyes report*.

Structure: + Judgement · + Person +

{zh: |kàn lái|it seems / |tā|he / |bù|not / |lái|coming / |le / 。 }

It seems he’s not coming.

{zh: |zài|in / |wǒ|my / |kàn lái|view / , |zhè ge|this / |jì huà|plan / |xíng bu tōng|won’t work / 。 }

In my view, this plan won’t work.

Remember: = “drawing it together, I reckon...” (a conclusion); = “it appears to the eye.” is the “arriving at a verdict” part — you’ve weighed things and landed on a view.

Watch out

- is “in *my* opinion” — a personal verdict, not a fact.

— “just right, as it happens”

is a happy bullseye — (exactly) + (right) — “just right” (in size, time, or amount) or “as it happens, happen to.” It plays both adjective and adverb.

Structure: Subject + + Verb Phrase · ... (adjective)

{zh: |nǐ|you / |lái|came / |le / ! |wǒ|I / |zhèng hǎo|was just about to / |yào / |zhǎo|look for / |nǐ|you / 。 }

You’re here! I was just about to look for you.

{zh: |zhè jiàn|this / |yī fu|outfit / |de / |dà xiǎo|size / |zhèng hǎo|just right / 。 }

This outfit is just the right size.

Remember: (exactly) (right) = a lucky bullseye — the right size, the right moment, the right amount, all landing at once.

Watch out

- Adverb (“just about to leave”) and adjective (“just the right size”) — same word, two roles.

— “have no choice but to”

is the **only option left** — (only) + (good/workable) — “the only workable choice, so I’ll take it (reluctantly).” English: “have no choice but to, can only, had to.”

Structure: (Situation,) (Subject +) + Verb Phrase

{zh: |cān tīng|the restaurants / |dōu|all / |guān mén|closed / |le / , |wǒ men|we / |zhǐ hǎo|had no choice but to / |qù|go / |chī|eat / |kuài cān|fast food / 。 }

The restaurants were all closed, so we had no choice but to get fast food.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |wàng|forgot / |le / |yù yuē|to book / , |zhǐ hǎo|so had to / |qù|go / |pái duì|queue / 。 }

I forgot to book, so I had to queue.

Remember: = “the **ONLY** good option left” — you do it, but you’d rather not. For a stronger, more forced “have to,” step up to .

Watch out

- It always carries a whiff of **reluctance** — the choice isn’t a happy one.

+ / — **emphatic negation**

This has nothing to do with “again.” In front of / it adds a **defensive, argumentative** kick — “(but) it’s not even / it’s not as if …” You’ll hear it constantly with / (“why on earth”).

Structure: + / + Predicate

{zh: |wèn|ask / |wǒ|me / |gàn má|why / ? |wǒ|I / |yòu|it’s not as if / |bù|don’t / |zhī dào|know / 。 }

Why ask me? It’s not as if I’d know.

{zh: |zhè xiē|these / |cài|dishes / |yòu|it’s not as if / |méi|haven’t / |huài|gone off / , |wèi shén me|why / |yào / |rēng|throw out / ? }

The food hasn’t even gone off — why throw it out?

Remember: + / = the “**it’s-not-as-if**” **shrug** (, …) — a verbal eye-roll defending yourself. It is *not* the “again” , even though it’s the same character.

Watch out

- It needs that defensive context — without an implied “so why…?”, it reads as plain “again.”

+ + — **emphatic “really, so”**

The adverb slams an adjective home — “really, so” — usually against what you’d expect. It’s informal and northern-flavoured, and it almost always closes with .

Structure: + Adjective +

{zh: |zhè zhī|this / |xiǎo gǒu|puppy / |kě|so / |táo qì|naughty / |le / ! }

This puppy is so naughty!

{zh: |tā|he / |kě|really / |yōu xiù|impressive / |le / ! }

He’s really impressive!

Remember: ... wraps an adjective in a “**wow, really!**” (, ,). It nearly always bookends with , and has a chatty, northern ring. (Note / are *not* examples of this pattern — there - is a word-building prefix meaning “-able / worthy of,” not the emphatic .)

Watch out

- also means “but,” can stress a verb (), or mean “finally” — context picks the sense.

— “**originally; so it turns out**”

wears two hats: “**original(ly), former**” (+ noun), and “**so it turns out / all along**” — that lightbulb moment when you suddenly grasp something you’d missed.

Structure: + + Noun · Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |yuán lái|so / |nǐ|you / |shì|are / |lǎo shī|a teacher / |a / ! }

Oh, so you’re a teacher!

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |yuán lái|originally / |zhù|lived / |zài|in / |Pǔ dōng|Pudong / 。 }

We originally lived in Pudong.

Remember: both senses share “**the way things really were all along.**” Realisation: (“ah, *so that’s* it!”). “Former”: (“the original price”). Contrast (“originally, *but it changed*”) at the end of this level.

Watch out

- The “aha!” sense is the one that surprises learners — ≠ “originally” there, it’s “it turns out.”

() — “**almost (and didn’t)**”

= “off by a hair” — something **nearly happened**, usually something **bad**, and the feeling is relief that it didn’t. The iron rule: whatever follows did **not** actually happen.

Structure: Subject + (+) + Predicate (+)

{zh: |chē|the car / |chà diǎn|almost / |zhuàng dào|hit / |wǒ|me / 。 }

The car almost hit me (it didn’t).

{zh: |wǒ|I / |jīn tiān|today / |chà diǎn|almost / |chí dào|was late / |le / 。 }

I was almost late today.

Remember: = “missed it by **THAT much**” → the thing did *not* happen (and good thing too). The famous quirk: *still* means “almost fell” — the adds feeling, not logic.

Watch out

- For a *wanted* outcome, flips to relief it *did* happen: (“only just caught it”).

+ — “always, all along”

(“from the very start”) with () means “always, have always.” But you’ll meet it far more often in the **negative** — / = “never (not once).”

Structure: Subject + + () + Predicate

{zh: |tā|he / |cóng lái|always / |dōu|has / |zhè yàng|been like this / 。 }

He’s always been like this.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |cóng lái|never / |bù / |hē jiǔ|drink / 。 }

I never drink.

Remember: = “from the beginning until now.” Positive form needs (...); negative is the everyday one — / = “never, not a single time.”

Watch out

- Don’t drop the in the positive: ✓, not .

— “as a result, in the end”

As a connector, (“result”) means “as a result, and in the end” — and it usually drags in an **unexpected or unwelcome** outcome. It opens the second clause with a twist.

Structure: Reason / Situation , + Result

{zh: |tā|she / |chuān|dressed / |de / |hěn|very / |shǎo|lightly / , |jié guǒ|as a result / |gǎn mào|caught a cold / |le / 。 }

She dressed too lightly and ended up catching a cold.

{zh: |tā|he / |kāi|drove / |de / |tài|too / |kuài|fast / , |jié guǒ|as a result / |zhuàng dào|hit / |le / |rén|someone / 。 }

He drove too fast and ended up hitting someone.

Remember: = “the (often nasty) upshot.” It sets up a payoff that’s usually bad or surprising — “...and as a result, *of course*, X.”

Watch out

- It’s also a plain noun (“result”): (“the exam results”).

— “enough”

means “enough, sufficient.” Its trick is that **position flips the mood:** before a verb/adjective it’s “enough to ...” (,); after certain verbs it’s “fed up” (). It often takes .

Structure: + Verb / Adjective (+) · Verb + +

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |mǎi|bought / |de / |cài|food / |gòu|enough / |chī|to eat / |le / 。 }

We bought enough food.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |shòu|put up with it / |gòu|enough / |le / ! }

I’ve had enough!

Remember: before = “enough to” (); / **V** after = “had enough **OF** it.” Same word, opposite feeling, decided by which side of the verb it sits.

Watch out

- = “sick of eating it” (fed up), not “ate enough” — mind that “fed-up” tilt.

— “even, to the point that”

hauls in the most **extreme or surprising** case — “even, so much that.” It frequently links arms with ... / for extra punch.

Structure:, () + Extreme Case + / ...

{zh: |tā|he / |tài|too / |máng|busy / |le / , |shèn zhì|even / |chī|to eat / |wǔ fàn|lunch / |de / |shí jiān|time / |dōu / |méi yǒu|hasn’t / 。 }

He’s so busy he doesn’t even have time for lunch.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|question / |hěn|very / |jiǎn dān|simple / , |shèn zhì|even / |lián / |hái zi|a child / |dōu / |zhī dào|knows / 。 }

It’s so simple even a child knows the answer.

Remember: = “...even **THIS!**” — it reaches for the most extreme example to drive a point home, often hand-in-hand with

Watch out

- It escalates — the thing after should be the *most* surprising item, not just another one.

+ + — “had better, after all”

Beyond “or,” before a verb settles on the **choice you prefer after weighing things up** — “had better, I’d rather (after all).” It loves to close with .

Structure: Subject + + Verb Phrase +

{zh: |hái shì|after all / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |qù|go / |ba / 。 }

Let’s go tomorrow after all.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |hái shì|had better / |bié|not / |qù|go / |le / 。 }

You’d better not go.

Remember: ... = “**on reflection, better to...**” — a verdict reached after mulling it over. Distinct from = “or” (in questions) or “still.”

Watch out

- The softens it into a gentle suggestion — dropping it makes the decision sound firmer.

— “had better, best to”

(“best”) moonlights as an adverb to give **gentle advice** — “had better, it would be best to.”

Structure: Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |nǐ|you / |zuì hǎo|had better / |xiān|first / |xiū xi|rest / |yí xià|a bit / 。 }

You’d better rest a bit first.

{zh: |wài miàn|outside / |lěng|cold / , |zuì hǎo|best to / |duō|more / |chuān|wear / |diǎn / 。 }

It’s cold out — best wear a bit more.

Remember: = “**the best thing would be...**” — advice with a soft touch, gentler than or . Negative: (“had best not”).

Watch out

- It’s a suggestion, not a rule — for an obligation use / instead.

— “have to, can’t but”

stacks a double negative — “not () able to not () do” — into a **reluctant, unavoidable** “have to.” It’s more forced and grudging than .

Structure: Subject + + Verb

{zh: |diàn tī|the lift / |yòu|again / |huài|broke / |le / , |wǒ men|we / |bù dé bù|had to / |pá|climb / |lóu tī|the stairs / 。 }

The lift broke again, so we had to take the stairs.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |tài|too / |lì hai|good / |le / , |wǒ|I / |bù dé bù|have to / |chéng rèn|admit it / 。 }

You’re so good — I have to admit it.

Remember: = “**can’t NOT do it**” (two negatives cancelling to a grudging yes). It shouts *no way out*; is the calmer, neutral “must / it’s required.”

Watch out

- Don’t miscount the negatives — means “have to go,” not “can’t go.”

— “on earth / after all / finally”

= “all the way to the bottom” — and it digs for the real answer. Three jobs: pressing in a question (“on earth, exactly”), “after all / in the end,” and “finally” (like).

Structure: · + Verb +

{zh: |nǐ|you / |dào dǐ|on earth / |xiǎng|want / |shuō|to say / |shén me|what / ? }

What on earth are you trying to say?

{zh: |tiān qì|the weather / |dào dǐ|finally / |nuǎn huó|warmed up / |le / 。 }

The weather has finally warmed up.

Remember: = “**get to the BOTTOM of it.**” In a *question* → “on earth / exactly” (); in a *statement* → “after all / finally.”

Watch out

- In a yes-no question, use the V-not-V form: (“are you going *or not*?”).

— “exactly, on earth” (formal)

is the more **formal** twin of — it sharpens a question hunting for a specific fact (a name, a time, a reason): “exactly, on earth.”

Structure: + Question Word ...

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |rén|person / |jiū jìng|on earth / |shì|is / |shéi|who / ? }

Who on earth is this person?

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |jiū jìng|exactly / |hái|still / |yào|have to / |děng|wait / |duō jiǔ|how long / ? }

Exactly how much longer do we have to wait?

Remember: = **in a suit**. Same “on earth / exactly” in questions, just a more written, formal register.

Watch out

- Both press a question; simply sounds more bookish than the everyday .

— “just (a moment ago)”

The adverb (or) marks an action that happened **a short time ago** — “just.” It sits right before the verb, and with a duration it needs no “ago” word.

Structure: Subject + + Verb

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |gāng|just / |zhī dào|found out / 。 }

We just found out.

{zh: |tā|he / |gāng|just / |lái|came to / |Zhōng guó|China / |liǎng ge|two / |yuè|months ago / 。 }

He came to China just two months ago.

Remember: = **adverb “just,” glued to the verb** () — and “two months ago” needs no extra word: . Don’t mix it up with the *noun* (“a moment ago”) — see the comparison file later.

Watch out

- + duration measures time from *now*; marks a *point* in the recent past.

+ + + — “one by one”

Double up + **measure word** and you get something happening **one unit at a time** — “one by one, step by step.” is the default measure word, but slot in whichever fits the noun.

Structure: + MW + + MW (+ Noun)

{zh: |bié|don’t / |chǎo|all shout / , |yí ge|one / |yí ge|by one / |shuō|speak / 。 }

Don’t all talk at once — one at a time.

{zh: |hái zi|the child / |yì tiān|day / |yì tiān|by day / |zhǎng dà|grows up / 。 }

The child grows up day by day.

Remember: repeat the measure word → “**one ____ at a time**”: (one by one), (step by step), (day by day), (over and over).

Watch out

- Match the measure word to the noun — for steps, for countable things.

— “originally (but it changed)”

means “originally, in the first place” — and it usually sets up that things **later changed course**. It often runs with ... plus a / clause; with it flips to “of course (it always was).”

Structure: Subject + (+) ... , ... · ...

{zh: |wǒ|I / |běn lái|originally / |yào|meant / |qù|to go / |de / , |kě shì|but / |hòu lái|then / |bìng|got sick / |le / 。 }

I’d meant to go, but then I got sick.

{zh: |bān jiā|moving house / |běn lái|to begin with / |jiù / |hěn|very / |má fan|troublesome / 。 }

Moving house is a hassle to begin with.

Remember: sets up a U-turn — “originally X... *but then* Y.” Contrast (a sudden *realisation*). And = “of course / obviously — it always was.”

Watch out

- If nothing changed and you mean “it turns out,” you want , not .

+ — “only (this one)”

Park in front of the subject or quantity and it spotlights how **little** there is — “only, just (this one).” It often rides with / .

Structure: + Subject + Predicate · + Verb + Number + MW

{zh: |dà jiā|everyone / |dōu / |xià bān|left work / |le / , |jiù|only / |lǎo bǎn|the boss / |hái|still / |méi|hasn’t / |zǒu|left / 。 }

Everyone’s left work; only the boss is still here.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |jiù|only / |qù guo|been there / |yí cì|once / 。 }

I’ve only been there once.

Remember: like + number, this **shrinks things to “only / just”** (,), underlining smallness. It’s a different from the “right away / as early as” one.

Watch out

- Context tells the two ’s apart: a small *quantity* nearby → “only”; a *time* → “as early as / then.”

— “be sure to, whatever you do”

(literally “thousand ten-thousand”) is an **urgent plea** — “be sure to / whatever you do (don’t) ….” The huge numbers *are* the emphasis. It almost always heads a command, paired with / / .

Structure: + (/ /) + Verb Phrase

{zh: |qiān wàn|whatever you do / |bié|don’t / |wàng|forget / |le / |dài|to bring / |hù zhào|your passport / 。 }

Whatever you do, don’t forget your passport.

{zh: |lù shàng|on the way / |qiān wàn|do be sure to / |yào / |xiǎo xīn|be careful / 。 }

Do be careful on the way.

Remember: big numbers = big urgency. piles “thousand” on “ten-thousand” to mean “I really, *really* mean it.” The go-to shape is … (“whatever you do, DON’T…”).

Watch out

- It belongs in pleas and warnings — not a neutral statement.

— “I’m afraid (that), probably”

has (“fear”) right in it, and that’s the feel: a **likely but unwelcome** prediction softened with “I’m afraid that, I worry that.” It opens the clause, ideally before the subject, often with / .

Structure: (Reason,) + Subject + Predicate

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |kǒng pà|I’m afraid / |yào|going to / |xià yǔ|rain / 。 }

I’m afraid it’s going to rain today.

{zh: |kǒng pà|I’m afraid / |wǒ|I / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |bù néng|can’t / |lái|come / 。 }

I’m afraid I can’t come tomorrow.

Remember: hides (fear) — it’s a worried “I’m afraid…” about something *unwelcome*, never a cheerful guess. Place it **before** the subject for the most natural ring.

Watch out

- For a neutral “probably” (no dread), use instead.

— “unexpectedly, actually”

(or just) flags something **surprising or hard to believe** — “unexpectedly, actually, of all things.” It sits after the subject. It’s a near-match for , just a touch milder.

Structure: Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |zhè me|such a / |nán|hard / |de / |tí|problem / , |tā|he / |jìng rán|actually / |zuò|got it / |duì|right / |le / 。 }

Such a hard problem — and he actually got it right!

{zh: |tā|he / |jìng rán|unexpectedly / |bǎ / |zhè|this / |jiàn / |shì|matter / |wàng|forgot / |le / 。 }

He actually forgot all about it!

Remember: = a jaw-drop — “...and yet, of all things, X!” Best rendered “actually / of all things.” ≈ (slightly stronger), opposite of (“sure enough, as expected”).

Watch out

- It needs genuine surprise — drop it into a humdrum statement and it sounds off.

— rhetorical-question marker

turns a sentence into a **rhetorical question** of disbelief — “don’t tell me …?, surely you don’t …?”. It usually closes with and fishes for **agreement, not an answer**. English has no single word for it.

Structure: + Rhetorical Question +

{zh: |nán dào|don’t tell me / |nǐ|you / |zhēn de|really / |xiāng xìn|believe / |tā|him / |ma / ? }

You don’t actually believe him, do you?

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |shì|is / |wǒ|my / |de / |shēng rì|birthday / , |nán dào|don’t tell me / |nǐ|you / |bù|don’t / |zhī dào|know / |ma / ? }

It’s my birthday — don’t tell me you forgot?

Remember: = a built-in “surely not…?!” It marks the whole sentence as rhetorical — you’re pressing for the listener to *agree*, not to inform you. Usually

Watch out

- Don’t answer a question literally — it’s making a point, not seeking facts.

... , ... — “first ... then ...”

... ... lines two actions up **in sequence** — “first A, then B.” As in HSK 3, the catch is that here means “(and) then,” **not** “again.” Chain longer runs with / .

Structure: + Verb 1 , + Verb 2

{zh: |xiān|first / |xǐ shǒu|wash hands / , |zài|then / |chī fàn|eat / 。 }

Wash your hands first, then eat.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yào|should / |xiān|first / |zuò|do / |zuò yè|homework / , |zài|then / |kàn|watch / |diàn shì|TV / 。 }

Do your homework first, then watch TV.

Remember: in, = “and then” (the next stepping stone), not “again.” Extend the chain with / for three or more steps.

Watch out

- Out of this pairing, *does* mean “again / more” — it’s the frame that fixes the “then” reading.

— “all ... too”

Stack (“also”) and (“all”) to sweep up a **whole group as well** — “all ... too.” The order is locked: **comes before** .

Structure: Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |wǒ|I’m / |hěn|very / |hǎo|well / , |wǒ|my / |de / |jiā rén|family / |yě dōu|all too / |hěn|very / |hǎo|well / 。 }

I’m well, and so is all my family.

{zh: |dà rén|adults / |xǐ huan|like / |zhè ge|this / |cān tīng|restaurant / , |hái zi men|the kids / |yě dōu|all too / |xǐ huan|like it / 。 }

The adults like this restaurant, and the kids all do too.

Remember: (also) + (all) in a **FIXED** order — , never . Think “also-all”: the whole group does it too.

Watch out

- Both adverbs sit before the verb together; you can’t split them around it.