Comparing similar adverbs

HSK 4 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.

本来 vs 原来 (originally vs it turns out)

Plan versus discovery

- You planned to take the bus, then found out your friend had been driving there all along.
- **我本来想坐公交车，原来你开车来了！** – "I was originally going to take the bus – oh, so you drove here!"

Both can mean "originally"

- **本来 / 原来 + earlier state**: 他本来住在北京 = 他原来住在北京 – "He originally lived in Beijing."
- Before a noun with 的, both work: 本来的计划 / 原来的计划.

他原来住在北京。
tā yuán lái zhù zài Běi jīng
Word guide: 他 – he; 原来 – originally; 住 – lived; 在 – in; 北京 – Beijing.



Only 原来: so it turns out

- **原来** announces a discovery: **原来是你！** – "Oh, it's you!"
- 本来 cannot do this: 本来是你 does not mean "so it's you".

原来他是老师。
yuán lái tā shì lǎo shī
Word guide: 原来 – so it turns out; 他 – he; 是 – is; 老师 – a teacher.

Only 本来: of course

- **本来就** = naturally, should have been obvious: 这件事本来就是你的错 – "This was your fault from the start."
- 原来就 does not carry this "of course" meaning.

Choose by job

- Discovery → 原来. Obvious from the start → 本来就. Original plan or state → either.
- **他本来不想来，后来朋友劝了他。** – "He didn't want to come at first, but then his friend persuaded him."

他本来不想来。
tā běn lái bù xiǎng lái
Word guide: 他 – he; 本来 – originally; 不 – not; 想 – want to; 来 – come.

Recap

- **Originally**: 本来 or 原来. **So it turns out**: only 原来. **Of course, naturally**: only 本来 (就).
- Pick the word by the job it does in the sentence.

Practise this pattern step by step.

常常 vs 往往 (often vs tends to)

Rainy Mondays

- You notice a pattern: the subway is always more crowded when it rains.
- **下雨的时候，地铁往往很挤。** – "When it rains, the subway tends to be crowded."

常常 = often (a frequency)

- **常常** says something happens often: 我常常去图书馆. It can describe the future: 以后我会常常来.
- It needs no special condition.

我常常去图书馆。
wǒ cháng cháng qù tú shū guǎn
Word guide: 我 – I; 常常 – often; 去 – go to; 图书馆 – the library.

往往: tends to (a pattern)



往往 = tends to (under a condition)

- **往往** describes a regular pattern found under certain conditions: **周末的超市往往人很多。** – "Supermarkets tend to be crowded at weekends."
- The condition (time, situation) is usually stated.

周末的超市往往人很多。
zhōu mò de chāo shì wǎng wǎng rén hěn duō
Word guide: 周末 – at weekends; 超市 – supermarkets; 往往 – tend to; 人 – people; 很多 – be many.

Where 往往 does not fit

- 往往 is not for wishes or the future: 以后我会常常来, not 以后我会往往来.
- Without a condition, 往往 sounds unfinished: 他往往迟到 is weak; 他下雨天往往迟到 works.

Side by side

- 我常常喝咖啡 – "I often drink coffee" (frequency).
- 我熬夜的时候往往喝咖啡 – "When I stay up late, I tend to drink coffee" (a pattern under a condition).

我熬夜的时候往往喝咖啡。
wǒ áo yè de shí hou wǎng wǎng hē kā fēi
Word guide: 我 – I; 熬夜 – stay up late; 时候 – when; 往往 – tend to; 喝 – drink; 咖啡 – coffee.

Recap

- **常常** = often (any time, including the future). **往往** = tends to, under a stated condition.
- 往往 is not for wishes or future plans.

Practise this pattern step by step.

刚 vs 刚才 (adverb vs time-word)

Just now, or just?

- You arrive at the café and your friend says he has only just sat down; a moment ago he was outside on the phone.
- **我刚到，刚才在外面打电话。** – "I've just arrived; a moment ago I was outside on the phone."

刚 is an adverb

- **刚 + verb** = have just (done): 刚到, 刚吃完. It stands right before the verb.
- It can stretch to "recently": 他刚来北京两个月.

他刚来北京两个月。
tā gāng lái Běi jīng liǎng gè yuè
Word guide: 他 – he; 刚 – just; 来 – came to; 北京 – Beijing; 两个月 – two months.

刚 + verb: has just · 刚才: a moment ago



刚才 is a time word

- **刚才** = a moment ago, like 昨天: it can start the sentence and works with adjectives and 没.
- **刚才很热，现在凉快了。** – "It was hot a moment ago; now it's cooler."

刚才很热，现在凉快了。
gāng cái hěn rè xiàn zài liáng kuai le
Word guide: 刚才 – a moment ago; 很 – very; 热 – hot; 现在 – now; 凉快 – cool.

Three tests

- Start of the sentence? Only 刚才. Before an adjective or 没? Only 刚才: 刚才没听见.
- With a duration after the verb (two months)? Only 刚: 刚来两个月.

■ Both possible

- **他刚走。 / 他刚才走了。** – both mean he left a moment ago.
- 刚 sentences usually have no 了; 刚才 sentences take 了 normally.

他刚才走了。
tā gāng cái zǒu le
Word guide: 他 – he; 刚才 – a moment ago; 走 – left.

■ Recap

- **刚 + verb** = have just (adverb; can stretch to "recently"; usually no 了).
- **刚才** = a moment ago (time word; can start the sentence; works with adjectives and 没).

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 本来 vs 原来 (originally vs it turns out)

2701.1 You open the door and see your cousin: "Oh, it's you!" …… 是你!

2701.2 "Students are of course supposed to study." Which fits? 学生 _____ 就应该学习。

- A. 本来
- B. 原来
- C. 后来
- D. 从来

2701.3 Match each sentence to its meaning.

- 1. 原来是这样!
- 1. 这本来就是你的事。
- 1. 他原来住在上海。
- A. He used to live in Shanghai.
- B. So that's how it is!
- C. This was your business from the start.

2701.4 本来的计划 and 原来的计划 both mean "the original plan".

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2701.5 You planned to take the bus, then found out your friend had been driving there all along. 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.

■ 常常 vs 往往 (often vs tends to)

2702.1 Complete: "At weekends, parks tend to be full of people." 周末公园里 …… 人很多。

2702.2 "I'll come and visit you often in future." Which fits? 以后我会 _____ 来看你。

- A. 常常
- B. 从来
- C. 往往
- D. 本来

2702.3 Build: "When I stay up late, I tend to drink coffee."

Arrange all chunks: 我熬夜的时候 / 咖啡。 / 喝 / 往往

2702.4 往往 works well for future plans.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2702.5 You notice a pattern: the subway is always more crowded when it rains. 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 (adverb vs time-word)

2703.1 Complete: "I didn't hear you just now." …… 我没听见。

2703.2 Which says "She's only been working here for a week"?

- A. 她在这儿工作一个星期刚。
- B. 她在这儿刚工作了一个星期。
- C. 她刚才在这儿工作一个星期。
- D. 刚她在这儿工作一个星期。

2703.3 Build: "It was hot a moment ago."

Arrange all chunks: 很 / 刚才 / 热。

2703.4 他刚走 and 他刚才走了 can both describe someone who left a moment ago.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2703.5 You arrive at the café and your friend says he has only just sat down; a moment ago he was outside on the phone. 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

■ 本来 vs 原来 (originally vs it turns out)

2701.1 原来

A discovery takes 原来.

2701.2 A. 本来

本来就 = naturally, of course.

2701.3 1–B: 原来是这样! = So that's how it is!; 2–C: 这本来就是你的事。= This was your business from the start.; 3–A: 他原来住在上海。= He used to live in Shanghai.

原来 = discovery or originally; 本来就 = of course.

2701.4 True.

For "original(ly)", both words work.

2701.5 One possible response: 我本来想坐公交车，原来你开车来了!

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.
- **本来就** = naturally, should have been obvious: 这件事本来就是你的错 – "This was your fault from the start."
- 原来就 does not carry this "of course" meaning.
- 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.

■ 常常 vs 往往 (often vs tends to)

2702.1 往往

A pattern under a condition (weekends) takes 往往.

2702.2 A. 常常

Future and wishes take 常常.

2702.3 我熬夜的时候往往喝咖啡。

Condition + 往往 + verb.

2702.4 False.

False. 往往 states what tends to happen from past experience and cannot describe future plans. For plans use 常常: 以后我会常常来看你.

2702.5 One possible response: 下雨的时候，地铁往往很挤。

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.
- 往往 is not for wishes or the future: 以后我会常常来, not 以后我会往往来.
- Without a condition, 往往 sounds unfinished: 他往往迟到 is weak; 他下雨天往往迟到 works.
- 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 (adverb vs time-word)

2703.1 刚才

Only 刚才 starts the sentence and goes with 没.

2703.2 B. 她在这儿刚工作了一个星期。

刚 goes before the verb, and the duration follows the verb with 了; 刚才 means "a moment ago" and cannot carry a duration.

2703.3 刚才很热。

刚才 + adjective.

2703.4 True.

True. 刚 is an adverb ("just"): 他刚走. 刚才 is a time noun ("a moment ago") and usually takes 了: 他刚才走了. Both fit someone who left a moment ago.

2703.5 One possible response: 我刚到，刚才在外面打电话。

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.
- Start of the sentence? Only 刚才. Before an adjective or 没? Only 刚才: 刚才没听见.
- With a duration after the verb (two months)? Only 刚: 刚来两个月.
- 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.