Comparing similar time words

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.

以后 vs 的时候 (after vs when)

When or after?

- You tell a friend about last night: you were cooking when he called, and you called back after dinner.
- **你打电话的时候我在做饭，吃完饭以后我给你回了电话。** – "When you called, I was cooking; after dinner I called you back."

的时候 = at the same time

- **A 的时候，B** = when A (is happening), B: the two overlap.
- 我到的时候，他正在吃饭 – "When I arrived, he was eating."

我到的时候，他正在吃饭。
wǒ dào de shí hou tā zhèng zài chī fàn
Word guide: 我 – I; 到 – arrive; 的时候 – when; 他 – he; 正在 – was; 吃饭 – eating.



以后 = after, one then the other

- **A 以后，B** = after A has finished, B: the second follows the first.
- 下课以后，我们去打球 – "After class, we'll go and play ball."

下课以后，我们去打球。
xià kè yǐ hòu wǒ men qù dǎ qiú
Word guide: 下课 – class ends; 以后 – after; 我们 – we; 去 – go; 打球 – play ball.

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■ Overlap or sequence?

- If B happens during A, use 的时候; if B happens after A ends, use 以后.
- 吃饭的时候别看手机 (during the meal) is different from 吃饭以后别马上睡觉 (after the meal).

■ With completed verbs

- Verb + 了 + 以后 stresses completion: 你到了以后给我打电话.
- For one finished event followed by another, 以后 is the safe choice: 我做完作业以后去睡觉.

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

■ Recap

- **的时候** = when (overlapping time); **以后** = after (one event follows another).
- Ask: does B happen during A or after it?

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 以后 vs 的时候 (after vs when)

3001.1 During the meal: "Don't look at your phone while eating." 吃饭 …… 别看手机。

3001.2 "After eating, don't go to bed straight away." Which fits? 吃饭 _____ 别马上睡觉。

- A. 以前
- B. 时候
- C. 的时候
- D. 以后

3001.3 Build: "After class, we'll go and play ball."

Arrange all chunks: 打球。/ 下课以后 / ， / 我们去

3001.4 我到的时候，他正在吃饭 means he was eating when I arrived.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

3001.5 You tell a friend about last night: you were cooking when he called, and you called back after dinner. 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 的时候 (after vs when)

3001.1 的时候

Overlapping time takes 的时候.

3001.2 D. 以后

After the meal has finished = 以后.

3001.3 下课以后，我们去打球。

A 以后，B.

3001.4 True.

True. … 的时候 marks time that overlaps with the main event: when I arrived, he was in the middle of eating. 以后 would mean he ate after I arrived.

3001.5 One possible response: 你打电话的时候我在做饭，吃完饭以后我给你回了电话。

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.
- If B happens during A, use 的时候; if B happens after A ends, use 以后.
- 吃饭的时候别看手机 (during the meal) is different from 吃饭以后别马上睡觉 (after the meal).
- 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.