

HSK 5 Grammar

English edition

1 Adjectives

1.1 + — “extremely, ... to death”

after an adjective cranks it to the extreme — “incredibly ..., ... to death.” On its own means “[oh no,] terrible!”, but as a complement it just intensifies, good or bad.

Structure: Adjective +

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |lěng|cold / |de bù dé liǎo|terribly / , |zěn me|how / |huì|can / |zhè me|so / |lěng|cold / ? }

It’s terribly cold today — how can it be this cold?

{zh: |shēng zhí|the promotion / |ràng|made / |tā|him / |gāo xìng|happy / |de bù dé liǎo|extremely / 。 }

Getting promoted made him over the moon.

Remember: = “...like crazy.” It swings both ways — (over the moon) and (dead on my feet) — and hits harder than or .

Watch out

- It needs the : , not .

1.2 + — “very, really”

after an adjective is a casual, emphatic “very, really” — a relaxed alternative to fronting , and a touch stronger.

Structure: Adjective +

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |dì fang|place / |piào liang|gorgeous / |de hěn|really / , |tuī jiàn|recommend / |nǐ|you / |qù|go / 。 }

This place is gorgeous — I really recommend you visit.

{zh: |bié|don’t / |dān xīn|worry / , |zhè cì|this / |kǎo shì|exam / |jiǎn dān|easy / |de hěn|really / 。 }

Don’t worry — this exam is dead easy.

Remember: the intensifier TRAILS the adjective: (not). It’s a casual, slightly stronger swap for a front — “” lands like “really good, honestly.”

Watch out

- Don’t double up — pick a front or a trailing , never both.

Tag () onto an adjective to say something is a touch too much — “a bit too ...” It’s softer than , so it’s the polite way to grumble.

Structure: Adjective + + ()

{zh: |zhè jiàn|this / |chèn shān|shirt / |xiǎo|small / |le / |diǎnr|a bit too / , |wǒ|I / |xiǎng|want / |huàn|to swap / |yí jiàn|it / 。 }

This shirt’s a bit too small — I’d like to swap it.

{zh: |nà ge|that / |dì fang|place / |lǐ|from / |wǒ jiā|my home / |yuǎn|far / |le / |yì diǎnr|a bit too / 。 }

That place is a little too far from my home.

Remember: Adj + = “a bit TOO ...” — a gentle complaint, softer than . Don’t confuse it with + Adj (“a bit ...,”), which sits before the adjective.

Watch out

- Position flips the feel: (“a bit big,” before) vs (“a bit too big,” after).

1.4 + — “have plenty of”

means there’s no shortage of something — “have plenty of, have all the ... you need.” It’s emphatic, sometimes a touch boastful. Note: it’s one fixed phrase, not (“some”) + .

Structure: Subject + + Noun

{zh: |bié|don’t / |jí|rush / , |wǒ men|we / |yǒu de shì|have plenty of / |shí jiān|time / 。 }

Don’t rush — we’ve all the time in the world.

{zh: |tā|his / |bà|dad / |shì|is / |dà lǎo bǎn|a big boss / , |yǒu de shì|has plenty of / |qián|money / 。 }

His dad’s a big boss — he’s got money to burn.

Remember: = “got loads of” — confident, even boastful, far stronger than . It’s a single fixed phrase — don’t read it as (“some”) + .

Watch out

- It takes a bare noun: / / — no measure word needed.

2 Adverbs

2.1 (advanced) — “even / already / now that”

Beyond “all,” moonlights in three ways: “**even** (to the point that)” (=); “**already**” (with a time, plus); and a tone of **complaint** (“now that ... !”).

Structure: Subject + + Predicate

{zh: |tā|he / |nán guò|upset / |de / |dōu|even / |kū|cried / |le / 。 }

He was so upset he even cried.

{zh: |dōu|already / |bàn yè|midnight / |le / , |nǐ|you / |zěn me|how come / |hái|still / |bù|not / |shuì|asleep / ? }

It’s the middle of the night already — why aren’t you asleep?

Remember: three side-jobs for : “**even**” (= :), “**already**” (time + :), and a grumble (“now that...!”, “it’s all your fault”).

Watch out

- The “already” sense needs a time phrase and a closing — .

2.2 ... (advanced) — sarcasm and reproach

+ **predicate** + drips with **surprise, sarcasm, or reproach** — “some ... you are!, and you call yourself ...!” It flags the gap between claim and reality.

Structure: Subject + + Predicate / Noun +

{zh: |hái|some / |hǎo péng you|“good friend” / |ne / , |tiān tiān|every day / |shuō|talks / |wǒ|my / |huài huà|behind my back / 。 }

Some “good friend” — bad-mouthing me every day.

{zh: |hái|and he / |liú guo xué|studied abroad / |ne / , |Yīng yǔ|his English / |zhè me|this / |chà|bad / ! }

He even studied abroad, yet his English is this bad!

Remember: **X** = “**call yourself an X?!**” — a sarcastic jab at the mismatch between the label and the reality. Almost always sealed with , said with an eye-roll.

Watch out

- Tone is everything — without the mocking delivery it just reads as plain (“still”).

Beyond “always,” paired with / / / states something **concrete and inevitable** — “is bound to, will (in the end), has to.” It can’t sit directly after the verb.

Structure: + / / / + Verb Phrase (+ /)

{zh: |zhè lǐ|here / |shì|is / |tā|his / |jiā|home / , |tā|he / |zǒng|is bound to / |huì / |huí lái|come back / |de / 。 }

This is his home — he’s bound to come back.

{zh: |zán men|we / |zǒng|have got to / |děi / |xiǎng|think of / |ge / |bàn fǎ|some plan / |ba / 。 }

We’ve got to come up with some kind of solution.

Remember: + /// = “**bound to / has got to.**” (“bound to come back”), (“have got to find a way”) — a settled sense of inevitability.

Watch out

- Pair it with an auxiliary — can’t sit bare right before a main verb here.

2.4 — “after all”

reaches for a **basic fact** to justify a judgement — “after all, when all’s said and done.” At home in speech and writing alike.

Structure: , ·

{zh: |bié|don’t / |mà|scold / |tā|him / |le / , |tā|he / |bì jìng|after all / |shì|is / |hái zi|a child / 。 }

Stop scolding him — he’s only a kid, after all.

{zh: |bì jìng|after all / |shì|it’s / |dōng tiān|winter / , |duō|more / |chuān|wear / |diǎn / |ba / 。 }

It’s winter, after all — dress more warmly.

Remember: = “**after all**” — it pulls out an undeniable fact you shouldn’t forget, to excuse or explain (, “he’s only a child, after all”).

Watch out

- It justifies, it doesn’t conclude — pair it with the fact, not the result.

2.5 + — “almost didn’t”

is + — and for a **desired** result it flips to good news: you **nearly failed but pulled it off**. Read the as part of the verb: “almost didn’t [verb].” No after.

Structure: Subject + + + Verb Phrase

{zh: |wǒ|I / |chà diǎn|almost / |méi|didn’t / |gǎn shàng|catch / |huǒ chē|the train / 。 }

I almost missed the train (but caught it).

{zh: |tā|he / |chà diǎn|barely / |méi / |tōng guò|passed / |kǎo shì|the exam / 。 }

He barely passed the exam.

Remember: for a **wanted** outcome, = “**nearly failed, but made it**” (= *caught* it!). For an **unwanted** one, plain (no) = “nearly happened, didn’t” (= wasn’t late). The with a good result is the twist.

Watch out

- It’s the classic exam trap — means you *did* catch it, despite the .

2.6 — “anyway, in any case”

sweeps the alternatives off the table — “anyway, regardless, either way.” Whatever the options, the result stands. It often follows a comma and teams up with .

Structure: [Disregarded situation] ,

{zh: |nǐ|you / |xìn|believe / |bù|or not / |xìn / , |fǎn zhèng|anyway / |wǒ|I / |xìn|do / |le / 。 }

Believe it or not — anyway, I do.

{zh: |bù guǎn|however / |duō|far / |yuǎn|it is / , |fǎn zhèng|anyway / |wǒ|I / |yào|will / |qù|go / 。 }

However far it is, I’m going anyway.

Remember: = “**either way, my mind’s made up**.” It brushes the options aside — the outcome doesn’t depend on them. It pairs naturally with / (“no matter..., ...”).

Watch out

- It signals a settled decision — don’t use it where the choice genuinely matters.

2.7 + — “as much as possible”

means push something **to the limit of what you can** — “as much as possible, do one’s best to.” It sits before a verb or adjective.

Structure: + Verb / Adjective

{zh: |wǒ|I / |huì|will / |jǐn liàng|do my best to / |bāng|help / |nǐ|you / 。 }

I’ll do my best to help you.

{zh: |qǐng|please / |jǐn liàng|as much as possible / |zǎo|early / |diǎn / |lái|come / 。 }

Please come as early as you can.

Remember: (**exhaust**) + (**amount**) = “**give it all you’ve got**.” It promises effort within limits — “I’ll do what I can.” = “come as early as you can manage.”

Watch out

- It’s “as much as possible,” not a guarantee — it quietly admits there’s a limit.

2.8 + — “each other”

marks a **two-way** action — “(do to) each other, mutually.” It usually leads a two-syllable verb; a one-syllable verb needs more material after it.

Structure: + Verb

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |yīng gāi|should / |hù xiāng|each other / |bāng zhù|help / 。 }

We should help each other.

{zh: |tóng xué|classmates / |zhī jiān|among / |yào|should / |hù xiāng|one another / |zūn zhòng|respect / 。 }

Classmates should respect one another.

Remember: = “**mutually, each other**” — a back-and-forth action, usually with a two-syllable verb: , , .

Watch out

- A one-syllable verb after feels bare — prefer the two-syllable form (, not).

2.9 + — “feel free to”

Here means “**feel free to, go right ahead**” — urging someone not to hold back. (A completely different sense from = “although.”)

Structure: + Verb

{zh: |yǒu|if you have / |shén me|any / |wèn tí|questions / |jǐn guǎn|feel free to / |wèn|ask / 。 }

Feel free to ask if you have any questions.

{zh: |yǒu|if you need / |shén me|any- / |shì|thing / |jǐn guǎn|don’t hesitate to / |zhǎo|come to / |wǒ|me / 。 }

Don’t hesitate to come to me if you need anything.

Remember: this = “**go right ahead, don’t hold back**” () — *not* the “although” of Same word, two unrelated jobs; context picks.

Watch out

- It’s encouragement, so it leads a bare verb — don’t pair it with here.

2.10 + — “just (do it), might as well”

proposes a **clean, decisive** way out of a fiddly spot — “might as well, just (do this).” The feeling: stop overthinking and *just*.

Structure: Subject + + Verb Phrase

{zh: |jiā lǐ|at home / |shén me|nothing / |dōu / |méi yǒu|there is / , |gān cuì|let’s just / |chū qù|go out / |chī|to eat / |ba / 。 }

There’s nothing at home — let’s just eat out.

{zh: |zhè|this / |diàn nǎo|computer / |yòu|again / |huài|broke / |le / , |gān cuì|might as well / |mǎi|buy / |tái|a / |xīn de|new one / |ba / 。 }

This computer broke again — might as well buy a new one.

Remember: = “**just do it / might as well**” — it cuts the dithering and picks the cleanest, most decisive option ().

Watch out

- It’s a decisive *suggestion* — it usually closes with .

/ ... slams the door — “never ... again.” The final (change of state) seals the determination or the settled fact.

Structure: Subject + + / + Verb Phrase +

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zài yě|never again / |bù / |xiǎng|want to / |kàn dào|see / |nǐ|you / |le / ! }

I never want to see you again!

{zh: |tā|he / |zǒu|left / |le / , |zài yě|never / |méi|did / |huí lái|come back / 。 }

He left and never came back.

Remember: ... = “**never AGAIN**” (future); ... = “**never did again**” (past). The closing slams the door shut on it.

Watch out

- Match the negative to the time: future intention → ; past fact → .

2.12 + + — “once, formerly”

plants an experience **firmly in the past** — “once (upon a time), formerly, ever.” It usually pairs with . To negate, use the formal / — **never** .

Structure: Subject + + Verb + . + / / ...

{zh: |tā|he / |céng jīng|once / |shì|was / |wǒ|my / |lǎo bǎn|boss / 。 }

He was once my boss.

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |céng jīng|once / |yì qǐ|together / |qù|went / |guo / 。 }

We once went there together.

Remember: ... = “**once, formerly**” — a closed chapter in the past. The negative is the *formal* / , never . With / / , drop the (...).

Watch out

- is more written/weighty than a plain past with — reserve it for “once upon a time” distance.

2.13 + — “repeatedly”

means doing something **again and again** — “repeatedly, time and again.” It’s formal, usually before a two-syllable verb of speech or thought, and usually without / .

Structure: + Verb Phrase

{zh: |lǎo shī|the teacher / |zài sān|repeatedly / |qiáng diào|stressed / |zhè cì|this / |kǎo shì|exam / |hěn|very / |zhòng yào|important / 。 }

The teacher stressed again and again that this exam matters.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |jué dìng|decision / |shì|was / |jīng guò|after / |zài sān|much / |kǎo lǜ|deliberation / |zuò chū lái|made / |de / 。 }

This decision was made after much deliberation.

Remember: = + = “two, three times over” = “again and again.” Formal, and it loves verbs of speech/thought: , , .

Watch out

- Keep it for two-syllable verbs in a formal register — in casual speech you’d use or .

2.14 — “simply, literally”

voices **amazement or exaggeration** — “simply, just, downright.” It precedes the over-the-top claim, often with With it means “basically.”

Structure: Subject + + Predicate . + + ...

{zh: |zhè lǐ|this place / |jiǎn zhí|simply / |shì|is / |tiān táng|heaven / ! }

This place is simply heaven!

{zh: |nǐ|your / |nán péng you|boyfriend / |jiǎn zhí|just / |tài|too / |shuài|handsome / |le / ! }

Your boyfriend is just gorgeous!

Remember: = a gasp of “simply / downright / I can’t even.” It signals exaggeration, often with ... (). = “basically is / amounts to” ().

Watch out

- It’s for hyperbole — drop it into a measured statement and it sounds overcooked.

2.15 + — “while you’re at it”

tacks on a **second, convenient** action — “while you’re at it, in passing, on the way.” / = “by the way.”

Structure: Subject + Verb Phrase 1 , + Verb Phrase 2

{zh: |nǐ|you / |qù|go / |mǎi|buy / |zǎo fàn|breakfast / |shùn biàn|while you’re at it / |bāng / |wǒ|me / |dài|grab / |bēi|a / |kā fēi|coffee / |ba / 。 }

While you’re out for breakfast, grab me a coffee.

{zh: |shùn biàn|by the way / |shuō|mention / |yí xià / , |wǒ|I / |zuì jìn|recently / |bān jiā|moved / |le / 。 }

By the way, I moved recently.

Remember: = “along the way, no extra trip” — the second action piggybacks on the first. = “go with the flow,” so = “while the going’s that way anyway.” = “by the way.”

Watch out

- The two actions must genuinely fit together — implies *no* extra effort.

2.16 () — “if ... not soon, then ...”

... .. warns of a **closing window** — “act now, or else.” It’s literally future + (“then”), and it carries urgency even without .

Structure: (Subject +) ()

{zh: |zài bù|if ... not now / |zǒu|leave / |jiù|then / |chí dào|be late / |le / 。 }

If we don’t leave now, we’ll be late.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |zài bù|if ... not now / |nǚ lì|work hard / |jiù|then / |kǎo bu shàng|won’t get in / |le / 。 }

If you don’t work hard now, you won’t get in.

Remember: = “if you don’t ... NOW, then ...!” — a ticking-clock warning with an implied “now.” (“if we don’t go now, we’ll be late”).

Watch out

- Different from the “again” — here = “(if) not any longer / not now.”

A genuine head-scratcher: and mean the **same** thing — “with great effort, finally managed to (after a struggle).” The is *not* a negative here. It usually pairs with .

Structure: Subject + () + + Result

{zh: |wǒ|I / |hǎo bù róng yì|after a real struggle / |cái / |mǎi dào|got / |piào|tickets / 。 }

I only got tickets after a real struggle.

{zh: |hǎo bù róng yì|finally, with great effort / |cái / |dào|reached / |shì zhōng xīn|downtown / , |fā xiàn|realised / |méi|hadn’t / |dài|brought / |shǒu jī|my phone / 。 }

I finally got downtown — then realised I’d left my phone.

Remember: = — both mean “only just managed, after a real struggle.” That is a red herring, *not* a negative. Both pair with ().

Watch out

- Don’t “fix” the — means it was *hard* to arrive, not easy.

2.18 + — “in vain, for nothing”

before a (usually one-syllable) verb means the effort was **wasted** — “(did) in vain, for nothing.” It often takes . (can also mean “for free.”)

Structure: + Verb (+)

{zh: |tā|he / |méi|didn’t / |lái|come / , |wǒ|I / |bái|in vain / |děng|waited / |le / |yí ge|an / |xiǎo shí|hour / 。 }

He didn’t come — I waited an hour for nothing.

{zh: |bái|wasted / |huā|spending / |le / |yì bǎi|a hundred / |kuài|kuai / , |zhè|these / |yī fu|clothes / |bù néng|can’t / |chuān|be worn / 。 }

Wasted a hundred kuai — these clothes can’t even be worn.

Remember: + verb = effort that drew a **BLANK** — (waited for nothing), (a wasted trip), (money down the drain). also means “for free” () — context tells which.

Watch out

- Usually one-syllable verbs: , , , .

Repeat a single-syllable verb around ... to paint a **drawn-out, repeated** past action — “...ed and ...ed.” It’s often chased by / (“but still ...”).

Structure: Subject + Verb + + + (same) Verb , (/)

{zh: |zhè ge rén|this person / |wǒ|I / |kàn|looked / |le / |yòu|and / |kàn|looked / , |hái shì|still / |bù|don’t / |rèn shi|recognise / 。 }

I looked and looked, but still don’t know him.

{zh: |tā|he / |xiǎng|thought / |le / |yòu|and / |xiǎng|thought / , |zuì hòu|in the end / |hái shì|still / |méi|didn’t / |qù|go / 。 }

He thought it over and over, and in the end still didn’t go.

Remember: **VV** = “...ed and ...ed (and still...)” — a single-syllable verb worn down by repetition (,). The sits after the *first* verb; / often follows to say nothing changed.

Watch out

- Single-syllable verbs only (, , ,) — the doubling is what shows the repetition.

2.20 — “differ a lot” (opposite of)

Where = “about the same,” says two things are **far apart** — “very different, not the same at all.”

Structure: Subject + · A + / + B +

{zh: |Zhōng|Chinese / |xī fāng|and Western / |de / |wén huà|cultures / |chà hěn duō|differ a lot / 。 }

Chinese and Western cultures are very different.

{zh: |zhè|these / |liǎng ge|two / |cí|words / |yì si|in meaning / |chà bu duō|about the same / , |dàn|but / |yòng fǎ|in usage / |chà hěn duō|differ a lot / 。 }

These two words mean about the same, but are used very differently.

Remember: (difference) (a lot) = “miles apart” — the exact flip of (“not much difference”). Same , opposite size of gap.

Watch out

- It’s a *gap* word — for “different in kind,” / fit better.

3 Auxiliary Words

3.1 — listing with

Drop after each item and you get a casual, **rattling-off** feel — “what with ..., and ..., you know, that kind of thing.” It marks a **non-exhaustive** list, and can be capped with (but not the formal).

Structure: Item 1 + Item 2 + (+)

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |shén me|all sorts of / |líng shí|snacks / |dōu / |yǒu|have / , |huā shēng|peanuts / |a / , |guā zǐ|seeds / |a / , |shǔ piàn|crisps / |a / 。 }

We’ve got all sorts of snacks — peanuts, seeds, crisps, you name it.

{zh: |yǐ zi|chairs / |a / , |zhuō zi|tables / |a / , |diàn nǎo|computers / |a / |shén me de|and so on / , |dōu|all / |mǎi hǎo|bought / |le / 。 }

Chairs, tables, computers and so on — all bought.

Remember: = a relaxed “what with X, Y, you know...” — each is a verbal breath between items, a casual non-exhaustive list. Cap it with if you like, but never the stiff .

Watch out

- It’s chatty — too informal for a formal list (use / there).

4 Conjunctions

4.1 + Suggestion + — “how about, or else”

floats an **alternative suggestion** — “how about ..., or else ..., why don’t we” It quietly seeks the listener’s consent, can open the sentence or follow the reason, and usually closes with .

Structure: Reason / Situation , + Suggestion + . + Suggestion , Reason

{zh: |dà jiā|everyone / |dōu / |yǒu diǎn|a bit / |lèi|tired / |le / , |yào bù|how about / |xiū xi|rest / |yí huìr|a while / |ba / 。 }

Everyone’s a bit tired — how about we rest a while?

{zh: |zhè lǐ|here / |tài|too / |chǎo|noisy / |le / , |yào bù|how about / |wǒ men|we / |huàn|change / |ge / |dì fang|place / |ba / ? }

It’s too loud here — how about we go somewhere else?

Remember: = “how about / or else...” — a gentle plan-B that asks for agreement, softer than a flat Read it as “if not (this), then...”. Don’t confuse it with (“if it weren’t for”) or (“otherwise”).

Watch out

- The is what makes it a *suggestion* rather than a demand — keep it.

5 Nouns

5.1 — “among, in the middle of”

means “among, in the midst of” — picking out a position **within** a group or space. With a group it’s “of all ...”; it can also be physically “in the centre,” or “in the middle of (a process).”

Structure: Group / Place / Process +

{zh: |nǐ|you / |shì|are / |wǒ|my / |suǒ yǒu|all / |péng you|friends / |dāng zhōng|of / |zuì|the most / |cōng míng|clever / |de / 。 }

Of all my friends, you’re the cleverest.

{zh: |tā men|them / |dāng zhōng|among / |hěn duō|many / |dōu / |shì|are / |Shàng hǎi rén|Shanghainese / 。 }

Many of them are Shanghainese.

Remember: = “in the midst of” — of a *group* (“of all...”:), a *space* (“in the centre”:), or a *process* (“mid-...”:). It always sits *after* what it’s inside.

Watch out

- It comes after the group/place, not before: ✓, not .

5.2 + — “each other, one another”

(literally “that and this”) means “each other, both sides” — a slightly **formal** cousin of . As an object it wants a two-syllable verb; it can also stand alone.

Structure: + Verb · Verb +

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |zhǐ|only / |jiàn guo|have met / |yí cì|once / , |bǐ cǐ|each other / |bù|don’t / |tài|very / |liǎo jiě|know / 。 }

We’ve only met once — we don’t know each other well.

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |yīng gāi|should / |bǐ cǐ|each other / |xìn rèn|trust / 。 }

We should trust each other.

Remember: = “that-and-this” = **each other** — the formal sibling of , with a two-syllable verb (, ,). Bonus idiom: = “likewise / same to you.”

Watch out

- Formal register — in everyday speech is more natural.

marks a stretch of time running **from a past point right up to now** — “(ever) since.” It usually opens the sentence; in formal writing it can be bracketed as ()

Structure: Time / Event + ,

{zh: |jié hūn|getting married / |yǐ lái|since / , |wǒ men|we / |méi|haven’t / |chǎo guo|had / |jià|a fight / 。 }

Since we got married, we haven’t had a single fight.

{zh: |shàng|starting / |dà xué|university / |yǐ lái|since / , |tā|he / |biàn|has changed / |le / |hěn duō|a lot / 。 }

Since starting university, he’s changed a lot.

Remember: = “from (then) up to NOW” — a continuous run reaching the present (,). In writing, wrap it: Set phrases: (“for ages now”), (“since history began”).

Watch out

- It implies the period reaches the present — for a closed past span, use / .

5.4 ... — “when, at the time of”

... frames **when** something happens — “when, at the moment that.” opens it; (or just) closes it.

Structure: + Event + ,

{zh: |dāng|when / |wǒ|I / |kàn dào|saw / |zhè|this / |zhāng / |zhào piàn|photo / |shí|when / , |wǒ|I / |jiù|immediately / |xiǎng qǐ|thought of / |le / |nǐ|you / 。 }

When I saw this photo, I immediately thought of you.

{zh: |dāng|when / |dì dì|my little brother / |è|is hungry / |de shí hou / , |tā|he / |jiù / |huì|will / |dà shēng|loudly / |kū|cry / 。 }

When my little brother is hungry, he cries loudly.

Remember: ... = a pair of brackets around “when...” (opens, closes). The is optional but adds a formal, narrative ring; can shrink to .

Watch out

- Don’t leave dangling without its / — they work as a pair.

5.5 + + Category — name-calling with

Slot + **category** after a name or pronoun and it adds a **wry, evaluative** colour — “you, ... of a ..., this so-called ...” It paints the noun with the speaker’s attitude, fond or critical.

Structure: Noun / Pronoun + + Category

{zh: |nǐ|you / |zhè ge|this / |rén|person / |a / , |tài|too / |cū xīn|careless / |le / 。 }

You — you’re just too careless.

{zh: |tā|he / |zhè ge|this / |lǎo shī|teacher / |dāng / |de / |zhēn|really / |bú cuò|good / 。 }

As a teacher, he’s really rather good.

Remember: Noun + + category = identification *with an attitude* — ... (“you — honestly!”). It’s not neutral pointing; it carries the speaker’s feeling, affectionate or exasperated.

Watch out

- Very colloquial — , . In neutral identification you’d just drop the .

6 Particles

6.1 + + — advanced placement

The completion can sit right after the **verb** *or* after the **object** — and which you pick depends on the object’s length. With a short object, either works; with a **long** object, put right after the verb so the listener isn’t left hanging. can also chain “after doing A, then B” in a future sequence.

Structure: Subject + Verb + + Object · Subject + Verb + Object +

{zh: |wǒ|I / |jīn tiān|today / |jiàn|saw / |le / |yí ge|an / |lǎo péng you|old friend / 。 }

I saw an old friend today.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |dào|get / |le / |jiā|home / |gěi / |wǒ|me / |dǎ diàn huà|call / 。 }

Call me once you’ve got home.

Remember: short object → either side; LONG object → right after the verb (— don’t make the listener wait for the). And VO... chains two future actions: (“come find you after class”).

Watch out

- With a long, modified object, after the object reads awkwardly — keep it on the verb.

6.2 + + — advanced with complements

When a complement follows the verb, usually goes **after the complement** (,). Wedging it **between** the verb and complement () is more written, and limited mostly to direction complements.

Structure: Subject + Verb + Complement + · (rarer) Subject + Verb + + Complement

{zh: |piào|the tickets / |mài|sold / |guāng|out / |le / 。 }

The tickets are sold out.

{zh: |tā|he / |zhàn|stood / |le / |qǐ lái|up / 。 }

He stood up.

Remember: default: AFTER the complement (,). *between* verb and complement is the exception — mostly direction complements (,), and more written.

Watch out

- is wrong — the sits after the whole verb-complement: .

6.3 + — topic-marking

The particle after a **topic** lets you name it, then comment — “as for ..., well, ...” The comment is often something you treat as **self-evident** — a gentle “well, obviously...”.

Structure: Topic + , Comment

{zh: |dì yī cì|the first time / |ma / , |yǐ hòu|later / |jiù / |huì|get the hang of it / |le / 。 }

It’s your first time — you’ll soon get the hang of it.

{zh: |míng pái|a brand name / |ma / , |yí dìng|surely / |bù|not / |pián yi|cheap / 。 }

Well, it’s a brand name — it’s bound to be pricey.

Remember: = “**well, obviously...**” — it flags a topic and frames the comment as common sense (— “it’s a brand name, *what do you expect*”). A “isn’t it clear?” softener.

Watch out

- The reading is “obvious / reasonable” — don’t confuse it with the question .

6.4 — softening a question

makes a question gentler and more **mus**ing or **reflective** — almost “(I wonder) ...?” It works after (weighing options), after a question word, or on a V–V question.

Structure: Question +

{zh: |tā|he / |qù|went / |nǎr|where / |le / |ne / ? }

Where’s he gone, I wonder?

{zh: |zhè|this / |shì|is / |shéi|whose / |de / |bǐ|pen / |ne / ? }

Whose pen is this, I wonder?

Remember: this = a **soft, musing** “(I wonder)...” — it takes the edge off a question word / / V–V query, often almost self-directed. Softer than a blunt .

Watch out

- It doesn’t form yes/no questions (that’s) — it rides on an existing question.

7 Prepositional Phrase

7.1 / / / — upper and lower limits

These “nouns of locality” set **limits** on a number, level, or rank. = “and above,” = “and below,” = “within,” = “beyond.” They come **after** the amount. In standard usage / / are **inclusive** of the boundary number (= ten and under, 10 included); only (and /) excludes it.

Structure: Amount / Level + / / /

{zh: |shí bā suì|eighteen / |yǐ shàng|and over / |cái|only then / |néng|may / |jìn|enter / 。 }

Only those eighteen and over may enter.

{zh: |qǐng|please / |zài|within / |sān tiān|three days / |yǐ nèi / |huí fù|reply / 。 }

Please reply within three days.

Remember: the limit word comes **AFTER** the amount (, not), and / / **include** the boundary number (= *ten and under*); only excludes it. Picture a number line: points up, down, stays inside, goes past.

Watch out

- = within a range; = beyond / except — don’t mix the inside/outside pair.

8 Prepositions

8.1 () — “ever since” (a starting point)

(or just) marks a **starting point in past time** — “ever since.” is the more formal of the two, and the clause often closes with or .

Structure: + Starting Point ,

{zh: |zì cóng|ever since / |lái dào|coming to / |Hú nán|Hunan / , |wǒ|I / |yuè lái yuè|more and more / |néng|can / |chī là|take spice / |le / 。 }

Ever since I came to Hunan, I can take more and more spice.

{zh: |zì cóng|ever since / |tā|he / |zǒu|left / |le / |yǐ hòu / , |gōng sī|the company / |hǎo|better / |duō / |le / 。 }

Ever since he left, the company’s much better.

Remember: () = the **START POINT** (“ever since...”); = the **PERIOD running from it**. (“since he left”) sets the point; ... stresses the span up to now. is the formal one.

Watch out

- The clause often closes with / — ..., marking the start clearly.

8.2 + Person + Predicate — “for (someone)”

(wèi) marks a **beneficiary** — “for, on behalf of.” Keep it apart from (“in order to”), which marks a *purpose*.

Structure: + Party + Verb / Adjective

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |dōu|all / |wèi|for / |nǐ|you / |gāo xìng|are happy / 。 }

We’re all happy for you.

{zh: |shéi|who / |wèi|for / |wǒ|me / |kǎo lǜ|has thought / |guo / ? }

Who’s ever thought of me?

Remember: + person = “for / on behalf of” (a beneficiary); + goal = “in order to” (a purpose). Person who benefits → ; aim you’re chasing → .

Watch out

- (“for you”) vs (“for money / in order to get money”) — person vs goal.

8.3 + Person + — “as far as ... is concerned”

... frames a **point of view** — “for ..., as far as ... is concerned.” It’s the formal twin of

Structure: + Person / Group + ,

{zh: |zhè yàng|this kind of / |de / |gōng zuò|job / |duì|for / |wǒ|me / |ér yán / |hěn|very / |zhòng yào|important / 。 }

This kind of job is very important to me.

{zh: |duì|for / |tā|her / |ér yán / , |zì yóu|freedom / |gèng|more / |zhòng yào|important / 。 }

For her, freedom matters even more.

Remember: ... = the **formal** ... (“from X’s point of view”). Save for writing; say in conversation.

Watch out

- It’s ..., a fixed frame — the closes it, like does.

8.4 () ... — “including”

() ... wraps items **into** a set — “including, ... counted in.” The closes the bracket.

Structure: () + Items + , · , () + Items +

{zh: |bāo kuò|including / |tā|his / |de / |mǔ yǔ|native language / |zài nèi / , |tā|he / |huì|speaks / |shuō / |sì zhǒng|four / |yǔ yán|languages / 。 }

Including his native language, he speaks four languages.

{zh: |shuǐ diàn fèi|utilities / |zài nèi|included / , |wǒ|my / |měi yuè|monthly / |fáng zū|rent / |sān qiān wǔ|3,500 / 。 }

Including utilities, my rent is 3,500 a month.

Remember: closes the “counted in” bracket — () X = “with X included.” Negate it with ... (“not counting...”). The is the lid on the box.

Watch out

- The is what completes it — ..., not a bare

8.5 — “on the basis of, by”

introduces **what one relies on or goes by** — “on the basis of, by virtue of, just because of.”

Structure: + Basis

{zh: |píng|with / |zhè zhāng|this / |piào|ticket / |kě yǐ|you can / |jìn qù|go in / 。 }

With this ticket you can go in.

{zh: |píng|on what / |shén me|grounds / |wǒ|I / |yào|have to / |tīng|listen to / |nǐ|you / |de / ? }

On what grounds do I have to listen to you?

Remember: = “going by / relying on” — (“by ticket”), (“on merit”). And the everyday challenge = “says who? / on what grounds?”.

Watch out

- is confrontational — it pushes back, not a neutral “why”.

8.6 — “as for, as to”

swings to a new topic — “as for, when it comes to, as to.”

Structure: + Topic , Comment

{zh: |zhì yú|as for / |jià gé|the price / , |wǒ men|we / |yǐ hòu|later / |zài|again / |tán|discuss / 。 }

As for the price, we’ll discuss it later.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |tóng yì|agree / , |zhì yú|as for / |zěn me|how / |zuò|to do it / , |tīng|it’s up to / |nǐ|you / |de / 。 }

I agree; as for how to do it, it’s up to you.

Remember: = a clean topic-switch (“as for X...”) — it parks the last point and turns to a fresh one. Like English “as for...”, it sits at the head of the new topic.

Watch out

- It introduces a *new* topic, not a contrast — don’t use it where you mean “but”.

8.7 — passive with

A before the doer plus a before the verb makes a colloquial **passive** — “(it) got ...ed (by someone).” The second stands in for .

Structure: Receiver + + Doer + + Verb Phrase

{zh: |wǒ|my / |de / |dàn gāo|cake / |gěi|by / |dì dì|little brother / |gěi / |chī|eaten / |le / 。 }

My cake got eaten by my little brother.

{zh: |bēi zi|the cup / |gěi|by / |tā|him / |gěi / |dǎ pò|broken / |le / 。 }

The cup got broken by him.

Remember: the second $\approx$ — (doer) (verb) is a chatty passive: (“the cake got eaten by little brother”). Casual speech only.

Watch out

- It’s colloquial — in writing use ().

8.8 ... (/) — “as far as ... goes”

... / narrows the discussion **to one aspect** — “as far as ... goes, in terms of”

Structure: + Aspect + / ,

{zh: |jiù|in terms of / |zhì liàng|quality / |lái shuō / , |zhè ge|this one / |gèng / |hǎo|better / 。 }

In terms of quality, this one’s better.

{zh: |jiù|as / |mù qián|things stand now / |ér yán / , |méi yǒu|there’s no / |wèn tí|problem / 。 }

As things stand now, there’s no problem.

Remember: X / = “in terms of X” — it zooms the lens onto a single aspect for the comment that follows (... , ...). This isn’t “then” — it’s “regarding”.

Watch out

- Don’t confuse this with the time/quantity — here it’s a topic-narrowing “as regards”.

8.9 — “while, taking the chance”

grabs a **favourable moment or condition** — “while, taking advantage of (the chance).”

Structure: + Situation / Opportunity

{zh: |chèn|while / |tiān qì|the weather / |hǎo|good / , |wǒ men|we / |qù|go / |yě cān|for a picnic / |ba / 。 }

While the weather’s good, let’s go for a picnic.

{zh: |chèn|while / |nián qīng|you’re young / , |duō|more / |chū qù|go out / |zǒu zou|and see things / |ba / 。 }

While you’re young, get out and see things.

Remember: = “**seize the moment / while it lasts**” — grab the chance before it’s gone. Set phrases nail the feel: (“eat while it’s hot”), (“while there’s still time”), .

Watch out

- It needs a *favourable* window — for a plain “when,” use

9 Sentence Patterns

9.1 () , — “if it weren’t for”

sets up a **counterfactual** — “if it weren’t for ..., (then) ...” (≈). The second clause says what *would otherwise* have happened.

Structure: + Condition () ,

{zh: |yào bú shì|if it weren’t for / |nǐ|you / , |wǒ|I / |huì|would / |mí lù|get lost / 。 }

If it weren’t for you, I’d get lost.

{zh: |yào bú shì|if it weren’t for / |dǔ chē|the traffic / , |wǒ|I / |zǎo jiù|already / |dào|arrived / |le / 。 }

If not for the traffic, I’d already be here.

Remember: = “**if it weren’t for...**” (=) — an *unreal* condition that didn’t happen, with the result clause spelling out the road not taken. (“if not for the traffic, I’d be there”).

Watch out

- It’s counterfactual — the condition is *contrary to fact* (there *was* traffic), so the result is what would have been.

9.2 () — “thanks to, luckily”

gives **grateful credit** that a bad outcome was dodged — “thanks to, luckily (because of).” It often takes and pairs with / (“otherwise”).

Structure: Good Outcome , () + Lucky Incident

{zh: |wǒ|I / |méi|wasn’t / |chí dào|late / , |duō kuī|thanks to / |le / |nǐ|you / |kāi chē|driving / |sòng|me / |wǒ / 。 }

I wasn’t late, thanks to you giving me a ride.

{zh: |duō kuī|luckily / |nǐ|you / |tí xǐng|reminded me / , |bù rán|otherwise / |wǒ|I / |kěn dìng|surely / |wàng|forget / |le / 。 }

Luckily you reminded me — otherwise I’d definitely have forgotten.

Remember: = “**thanks to (you/it), disaster dodged.**” It credits a *specific* person or thing (whereas thanks plain luck), and it loves a / to spell out the averted bad outcome.

Watch out

- It’s gratitude for a near-miss — pair it with the “otherwise…” to show what was avoided.

9.3 () — “that’s all, merely”

End a sentence with to play the matter **down** — “merely ..., that’s all, nothing more.”
It often rides with / / .

Structure: (/ +) +

{zh: |yì bēi|just a / |kā fēi|coffee / |ér yǐ|that’s all / , |bié|don’t / |zhè me|so / |gǎn dòng|be moved / 。 }

It’s just a coffee — don’t be so touched.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zhǐ shì|was just / |kāi|making / |ge / |wán xiào|a joke / |ér yǐ|that’s all / 。 }

I was only joking, that’s all.

Remember: deflates: “...and that’s ALL, no big deal.” It tags the end of a sentence, often after / (), shrinking the thing to nothing much.

Watch out

- It minimises — don’t use it where you actually want to emphasise.

9.4 — formal

In formal or written Chinese, does the job of , moving the object before the verb — “take (object) and”

Structure: Subject + + Object + Verb Phrase

{zh: |tā|he / |jiāng / |zhè xiē|all the / |dàn gāo|cake / |dōu / |chī wán|ate up / |le / 。 }

He ate up all the cake.

{zh: |qǐng|please / |jiāng / |shǒu jī|your phone / |tiáo|set / |chéng|to / |jìng yīn|silent / 。 }

Please set your phone to silent.

Remember: = the written-Chinese — same disposal job, formal register (=). You’ll meet it in notices and announcements. (also means future “will / shall” — a separate use.)

Watch out

- Keep it for formal/written contexts — in speech, is the natural choice.

10 Verbs

10.1 + — challenging an action

A verb followed by (often the **same verb** again) is a **rhetorical, annoyed** pushback — “what are you ...ing for? / stop ...ing!” With a separable verb, splits the two halves.

Structure: Verb + + (same) Verb · Verb + + Object

{zh: |nǐ|you / |kū|crying / |shén me|what for / |kū / , |yòu|it’s not as if / |bú shì / |méi yǒu|there’s no / |nǐ|your / |de / |lǐ wù|gift / 。 }

What are you crying for? It’s not as if there’s no gift for you.

{zh: |lí|divorce / |shén me|what / |hūn / ! |nǐ men|you / |cái|only / |jié hūn|married / |sān ge yuè|three months / 。 }

Divorce?! You’ve only been married three months!

Remember: V + (+ V) = an irritated “what are you ...ing for?!” — (“quit crying!”), (“what’s the rush?!”). Separable verbs split around it: , .

Watch out

- It’s blunt and familiar — fine between close friends/family, rude to strangers.

10.2 ... / ... — “not as ... as”

 means “(just) like”; + **B** + / + **Adj** says A falls **short of B** on some quality — “not as ... as B.”

Structure: Noun 1 + + Noun 2 + + Adj · Noun 1 + + Noun 2 + / + Adj

{zh: |tā|she / |yǒu shí hou|sometimes / |xiàng|like / |xiǎo hái|a child / |yí yàng|just / |tiān zhēn|naive / 。 }

She’s sometimes as naive as a child.

{zh: |jīn tiān|today / |bú xiàng|not as ... as / |zuó tiān|yesterday / |nà me|so / |lěng|cold / 。 }

Today isn’t as cold as yesterday.

Remember: ... = “just like”; = “not as ... as.” (“today isn’t as cold as yesterday”). The / carries the degree being fallen short of.

Watch out

- It’s a near-twin of the comparison (HSK 3) — both say “falls short of.”

... () opens a **comparison frame** — “compared with B, A is ...” It puts B forward as the yardstick. A variant is (/ /) **B** .

Structure: + B (+) , A + **Comment** · () B , A ~

{zh: |bǐ qǐ|compared with / |Shàng hǎi|Shanghai / , |wǒ|my / |lǎo jiā|hometown / |de / |wù jià|prices / |pián yi|cheaper / |duō|much / |le / 。 }

Compared with Shanghai, my hometown’s prices are much cheaper.

{zh: |yǔ|compared with / |wǎng luò|online / |jiào xué|teaching / |xiāng bǐ / , |wǒ|I / |gèng / |xǐ huan|prefer / |miàn duì miàn|face-to-face / 。 }

Compared with online teaching, I prefer face-to-face.

Remember: B () / B = “**set against B, ...**” — it foregrounds the *yardstick* B, then delivers the verdict on A. The everyday cousin is ... (HSK 3).

Watch out

- It frames the comparison; for a plain “A is more X than B,” a bare (AB...) is enough.

10.4 — “not as good as / better to”

has two jobs: “A B (+ Adj)” = “A isn’t as (good / ...) as B”; and “(... ,) ...” = “(rather than ...,) better to ...” Drop the adjective and just means “not as good as.”

Structure: A + + B (+ Adj) · (... ,) ...

{zh: |zhè jiàn|this / |qún zi|dress / |bù rú|isn’t as ... as / |nà jiàn|that one / |hǎo kàn|pretty / 。 }

This dress isn’t as pretty as that one.

{zh: |yǔ qí|rather than / |kōng xiǎng|daydream / , |bù rú|better to / |mǎ shàng|right away / |xíng dòng|act / 。 }

Rather than daydreaming, better to act right away.

Remember: = “**falls short of / better to.**” AB = “A isn’t as good as B” (, “I’m no match for him”); = “rather than..., better to...”. With no adjective, it’s plain “inferior to.”

Watch out

- sets up the rejected option, the preferred one — keep that order.

The suffix turns a noun or adjective into a **process verb** — “-ize, -ify, become.”

Structure: Noun / Adjective +

{zh: |chéng shì|cities / |xiàn dài huà|are modernising / |de / |hěn|very / |kuài|fast / 。 }

Cities are modernising fast.

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |yào|want to / |bǎ / |liú chéng|the process / |zì dòng huà|automate / 。 }

We want to automate the process.

Remember: = **English “-ize / -ify”** — bolt it on to get a “turn into” verb: (modernize), (beautify), (automate), (internationalize), (diversify).

Watch out

- It’s a productive academic suffix — great for abstract/process nouns, odd on everyday ones.

10.6 — “count as, consider”

judges that something **counts as** a category — “count as, be considered, qualify as.” On its own, = “forget it.”

Structure: Subject + + Adjective / Category +

{zh: |zài|in / |wǒ men|our / |bān|class / , |tā|he / |suàn|counts as / |gāo|tall / |de / 。 }

In our class, he counts as tall.

{zh: |zhè|this / |diǎn|bit of / |qián|money / |bù|isn’t / |suàn|counted as / |duō|a lot / 。 }

This bit of money isn’t much.

Remember: = “**reckons as / counts as**” — (“calculate”) used to *judge a category*: (“counts as tall”). And the everyday on its own = “forget it, let it go.”

Watch out

- The category form often closes with : , .

10.7 — “no wonder”

voices a sudden **realisation** — “no wonder, that explains why.” It precedes the now-understood fact and often pairs with .

Structure: + Person / Fact

{zh: |nán guài|no wonder / |tā|he / |méi|didn’t / |lái|come / , |yuán lái|it turns out / |shēng bìng|he’s sick / |le / 。 }

No wonder he didn’t come — turns out he’s ill.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |shì|are / |xīn lái|new / |de / , |nán guài|no wonder / |wǒ|I / |bù|don’t / |rèn shì|know / |nǐ|you / 。 }

You’re new — no wonder I don’t know you.

Remember: = “no wonder!” — the moment the penny drops. Literally (hard) + (to blame): “can’t blame it, given that...”. It loves a to deliver the reason (... , ...).

Watch out

- It introduces the *thing now explained*; the explanation follows (often with).

11 Auxiliary verbs

11.1 / / — formal future

(and /) marks a **future** action in formal or written Chinese — “will, shall, is going to.” It’s the news-and-notice equivalent of the spoken / .

Structure: Subject + / / + Verb Phrase

{zh: |dà huì|the conference / |jiāng|will / |yú|on / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |kāi shǐ|begin / 。 }

The conference will begin tomorrow.

{zh: |tā|he / |jiāng|will / |chéng wéi|become / |yí ge|a / |hǎo|good / |bà ba|father / 。 }

He will make a good father.

Remember: = the written “will” — the register of news and notices (); in speech you’d say / . It combines freely: , , same meaning. (The very same also serves as a formal — context decides.)

Watch out

- Reserve it for formal/written contexts — in casual chat sounds stiff.

12 Verb phrases

12.1 + — “hard to avoid, bound to”

says something is **practically unavoidable** — “hard to avoid, inevitably, bound to (happen).” The outcome is usually negative-but-natural, and it often takes .

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

{zh: |gāng|when you first / |kāi shǐ|start / |shuō|speaking / |wài yǔ|a foreign language / , |nán miǎn|inevitably / |huì / |yǒu|have / |wù huì|misunderstandings / 。 }

Starting out in a foreign language, misunderstandings are inevitable.

{zh: |nián qīng rén|young people / |nán miǎn|are bound to / |huì / |yù dào|hit / |cuò zhé|setbacks / 。 }

Young people are bound to face setbacks.

Remember: = (hard) + (to avoid) = “hard to avoid, bound to.” It carries a forgiving shrug — the (usually unwanted) outcome is only natural — and often takes a ().

Watch out

- It’s for the *naturally inevitable*, with an understanding tone — not a flat “must”.

12.2 + — passive with

before a (usually two-syllable) verb forms a **passive** — “be ...ed, receive, suffer” (a role like). It’s common in formal phrasing and set words.

Structure: + (Agent) + Verb

{zh: |Zhāng|Teacher Zhang’s / |lǎo shī / |de / |kè|classes / |hěn|very / |shòu|are / |xué shēng|by students / |huān yíng|welcomed / 。 }

Teacher Zhang’s classes are very popular with students.

{zh: |zhè cì|this time / |tā|he / |shòu|got / |le / |shāng|injured / 。 }

He got injured this time.

Remember: = “receive / suffer” (a passive) — burn in the set words: (“be welcomed / popular”), (“be affected”), (“get hurt”), (“can’t stand it”).

Watch out

- It mostly lives in fixed two-syllable combos — learn them as units rather than building freely.

13 ”But” Statements

13.1 , — “on the contrary, instead”

flags a result that runs **against expectation** — “on the contrary, instead, actually.” It’s an **adverb**, so it sits **after the subject and before the verb** (unlike the conjunction , which leads). It’s often the second half of a / + frame.

Structure: , Subject + + Unexpected Outcome

{zh: |chī|taking / |le / |yào|the medicine / , |bìng|the illness / |fǎn ér|actually / |gèng|even / |yán zhòng|worse / |le / 。 }

After taking the medicine, the illness actually got worse.

{zh: |tā|he / |bú dàn|not only / |méi|didn’t / |fàng qì|give up / , |fǎn ér|but actually / |gèng|even / |nǚ lì|harder / |le / 。 }

Far from giving up, he actually worked even harder.

Remember: = “instead, the opposite of what you’d expect” — an adverb tucked *after the subject* (... , never ...). It often completes the frame / + / ... , ... (“far from ...ing, actually ...”).

Watch out

- Don’t lead the sentence with it like English “instead” — it sits before the verb, inside the clause.

14 “Even If” Statements

14.1 , — “even if”

... ... grants a **hypothetical** and says it **changes nothing** — “even if ..., still ...” (One of a family with , , .) Use it for a supposition, not an actual fact — for an actual present fact, use .

Structure: + Hypothetical , + Action

{zh: |jiù shì|even if / |zhè tái|this / |diàn nǎo|computer / |jià gé|costs / |shàng wàn|over 10,000 / , |wǒ|I / |yě|still / |huì|will / |mǎi|buy it / 。 }

Even if this computer costs over ten thousand, I’ll still buy it.

{zh: |jiù shì|even if / |tā|he / |biàn chéng|became / |qióng guāng dàn|penniless / , |wǒ|I / |yě|still / |yuàn yì|would want / |gēn|to be with / |tā|him / |zài yì qǐ / 。 }

Even if he were penniless, I’d still want to be with him.

Remember: = “even if ... still” — a hypothetical, in the same family as / / , all needing the . A real, present fact takes , not .

Watch out

- This is “even if,” not “is exactly” — the downstream confirms the “even if” reading.

14.2 , — “even if (granting)”

... ... is a colloquial “even if / even supposing” — often when the speaker **doubts** the hypothetical, or brushes it aside. ... = “even if ..., so what?”; + Adj + = “no matter how Adj.”

Structure: + Hypothetical , + Result · + + Adj , ...

{zh: |jiù suàn|even if / |nǐ|you / |bù xiǎng|don’t want to / |tīng|hear it / , |wǒ|I / |yě|still / |yào|will / |shuō|say it / 。 }

Even if you don’t want to hear it, I’m saying it.

{zh: |jiù suàn|even if / |tā|he / |lái|came / |le / , |yòu / |zěn me yàng|so what / ? }

Even if he did come — so what?

Remember: = “even supposing” — with a shrug of doubt or dismissal. ... = “even if so, so what?”; ... = “no matter how expensive...”. The colloquial cousin of .

Watch out

- It often dismisses the hypothetical as not mattering — a slightly more “so what” tone than .

... ... grants even the **most serious or extreme** case — “even if ..., still ...” Its tone is **stronger** than / . + Adj + = “no matter how Adj.”

Structure: + Extreme Hypothetical , + Result

{zh: |nǎ pà|even if / |tā|his / |bà ba|father / |shì|were / |zǒng tǒng|president / , |wǒ|I / |yě|still / |bù|wouldn’t / |jià gěi|marry / |tā|him / ! }

Even if his father were president, I wouldn’t marry him!

{zh: |nǎ pà|no matter how / |zài / |lèi|tired / , |tā|she / |yě|still / |yào|wants to / |jiàn shēn|work out / 。 }

However tired she is, she still works out.

Remember: = the **STRONGEST “even if”** — it reaches for the most extreme or far-fetched case (.....). Lit. “what’s there to fear” → “even granting the worst.” + Adj + = “no matter how Adj.”

Watch out

- The three “even if”s scale up: (neutral) → (casual, doubtful) → (extreme).

15 ”If” Statements

15.1 , — “if ... then ...”

... ... states a **hypothetical** — “if ..., then” It’s a more **formal** sibling of / , at home in both writing and speech.

Structure: + Statement , + Result

{zh: |jiǎ rú|if / |wǒ|I / |shì|were / |nǐ|you / , |wǒ|I / |jiù|would / |jiè yān|quit smoking / 。 }

If I were you, I’d quit smoking.

{zh: |jiǎ rú|if / |nǐ|your / |de / |chéng jì|grades / |zài|a little / |hǎo|higher / |yì diǎnr / , |jiù|then / |néng|could / |shēn qǐng|apply to / |Běi Dà|Peking University / |le / 。 }

If your grades were a bit higher, you could apply to Peking University.

Remember: = **the formal** (= “suppose”) — same “if,” dressier register, same in the result. Slots into the if-family: / (everyday) → (formal).

Watch out

- Like the others, it pairs with —

15.2 — “what if (the worst)”

(literally “ten-thousand to one”) raises an **unlikely but worrying** possibility — “what if ..., in case ..., on the off chance.” It’s usually for undesirable scenarios, as a question (/) or a statement.

Structure: + Bad Possibility + . + ... ,

{zh: |dài|take / |bǎ / |sǎn|an umbrella / |ba / , |wàn yī|what if / |xià yǔ|it rains / |ne / ? }

Take an umbrella — what if it rains?

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yào|will / |jì|write it / |xià lái|down / , |wàn yī|in case / |wàng|I forget / |le / |kě yǐ|I can / |chá|look it up / 。 }

I’ll write it down — in case I forget, I can look it up.

Remember: = “one-in-ten-thousand” = a low-odds, high-stakes “what if...?” — the worried, better-safe scenario. The set phrase = “(just) in case.”

Watch out

- It flags a *small chance of big trouble* — for an even-odds “if,” use .

15.3 Topic + , Comment — marking “if”

Tag onto a clause to softly mark it as a **condition** — “if ..., (then)” It’s a relaxed, spoken “if,” often paired with / at the front.

Structure: (+) Condition + ,

{zh: |nǐ|you / |xiǎng|want / |qù|to go / |de huà|if / , |wǒ|I / |péi|will go with / |nǐ|you / 。 }

If you want to go, I’ll come with you.

{zh: |bù|not / |xǐ huan|like it / |de huà|if / |jiù|then / |bié|don’t / |mǎi|buy it / 。 }

If you don’t like it, don’t buy it.

Remember: = a soft, spoken “if,” tagged on the **END of the condition** (...). Think of it as a closing bracket on the “if” — droppable, and often paired with a front / .

Watch out

- It marks the *condition* clause’s tail — it doesn’t go on the result.

16 Adverbs with Adjectives

16.1 + / — “especially, exceptionally”

pushes a quality beyond the usual — “especially, exceptionally, particularly.” It’s a touch more literary than , marking something that **stands out from the norm**.

Structure: + Adjective / Verb

{zh: |yǔ hòu|after the rain / |de / |kōng qì|the air / |gé wài|exceptionally / |xīn xiān|fresh / 。 }

The air after rain is exceptionally fresh.

{zh: |jiàn dào|seeing / |lǎo péng you|her old friend / , |tā|she / |gé wài|especially / |gāo xìng|happy / 。 }

Seeing her old friend, she was especially happy.

Remember: = “**outside the usual grid**” (= a frame/square) → “exceptionally, beyond the norm.” It’s the more literary, stands-out cousin of .

Watch out

- It implies a *departure from normal* — for plain “very,” / fit; for “stands out,” .

17 Cause/Effect Statements

17.1 , — stating the effect before the cause

... ... states the **result first**, then explains it — “the reason (why) ... is that” It flips the usual to spotlight the outcome. The second half can also be (purpose) or (intention).

Structure: + Result , / / + Cause

{zh: |tā|he / |zhī suǒ yǐ|the reason why / |chéng gōng|succeeded / , |shì yīn wèi|is because / |hěn|very / |nǚ lì|hard-working / 。 }

The reason he succeeded is that he worked very hard.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |zhī suǒ yǐ|the reason / |gào su|am telling / |nǐ|you / , |shì xiǎng|is to / |ràng|make / |nǐ|you / |xiǎo xīn|careful / 。 }

The reason I’m telling you is to make you careful.

Remember: = **run backwards** — outcome up front (“the reason X...”), cause behind (“...is that Y”). Use it to put the *result* in the spotlight. Tail variants: (purpose), (intention).

Watch out

- Keep the order: + result, then + cause — don’t put the cause first.

18 Complements

18.1 + + / / / — advanced degree complements

After **Adj** + , a fixed phrase like / / / cranks the quality to an extreme — “... terribly, ... like crazy.” (You already know - and -; these are the other common ones.)

Structure: Adjective + + / / /

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |hái zi|child / |zì sī|selfish / |de hěn|terribly / 。 }

This child is terribly selfish.

{zh: |wǒ|my / |bà ba|father / |gù zhí|stubborn / |de / |bù dé liǎo|awfully / 。 }

My father is awfully stubborn.

Remember: a kit of “...like crazy” tails after **Adj** + : , , , (all “... to death / unbearably”). They sit alongside the - / - you already know.

Watch out

- These all need the (); the - / - forms attach bare.

18.2 + / — advanced potential complements

/ (here reads **liǎo**) after a verb asks whether the action **can be managed or pulled off** — often hinting at an outside factor. ≈ “can’t (because of circumstances).”

Structure: Verb + /

{zh: |zhè me|so / |duō|much / |cài|food / , |wǒ|I / |chī|eat / |bù liǎo|can’t manage / 。 }

So much food — I can’t finish it all.

{zh: |tā|he / |nà me|so / |lǎo|old / , |zǒu|walk / |de liǎo|can manage / |nà me|that / |duō|far / |lù / |ma / ? }

He’s so old — can he walk that far?

Remember: here = **liǎo** (“manage / finish”) — V / V = “can / can’t *pull it off*,” usually due to circumstances (“can’t finish,” “can’t make it”). Different from (“not allowed”).

Watch out

- Mind the reading: = *liǎo* here, not the *le* of completion.

Three handy result complements: = hold firm / come to a halt (,); = apart / away, or relief from a worry (, “let it go”); () = come into being / figure out (,).

Structure: Verb + / / ()

{zh: |wǒ|I / |jì|remember / |bù|can’t / |zhù|hold / |zhè me|so / |duō|many / |shēng cí|new words / 。 }

I can’t retain so many new words.

{zh: |xiǎng|let / |kāi|it go / |yì diǎn|a bit / , |bié|don’t / |nán guò|be sad / |le / 。 }

Try to let it go — don’t be sad.

Remember: picture each complement: = grip/stop (“hold in memory,” “halt”); = part/away (“go away,” “open up the knot = get over it”); () = bring forth (“think up,” “make out”).

Watch out

- (“let it go”) vs (“think up”) — same , opposite results from the complement.

18.4 + — “... terribly, ... to bits”

The complement (like) means a feeling has hit an **overwhelming** pitch — “... terribly, ... to bits.” Despite (“bad”), it just means “extremely,” and can even be positive.

Structure: Adjective / psych-Verb +

{zh: |dà jiā|everyone / |dōu / |lèi|tired / |huài le|out / 。 }

Everyone was worn out.

{zh: |hái zi|the child / |bú jiàn|went missing / |le / , |mā ma|the mother / |jí|frantic / |huài le / 。 }

The child went missing — the mother was frantic.

Remember: = “...to bits,” not “broken” — pure intensity, even for good feelings: (worn out), (starving), (frantic), (thrilled to bits).

Watch out

- Don’t read as “happiness broke” — is just “extremely.”

(read **zháo**) after a verb means the action **hit its mark** — “succeeded in, managed to.” Don’t confuse it with the aspect particle (*zhe*). Its potential forms are / .

Structure: Verb + (zháo)

{zh: |bǎo bao|the baby / |gāng|just / |shuì zháo|fell asleep / 。 }

The baby just fell asleep.

{zh: |zuó wǎn|last night / |wǒ|I / |méi|didn’t / |shuì zháo|manage to sleep / 。 }

I couldn’t fall asleep last night.

Remember: = zháo here = “hit the target, succeeded” — (managed to sleep), (found), (can’t get hold of). A world away from the *zhe* of an ongoing state ().

Watch out

- Two readings, two jobs: (*zháo*, “fell asleep,” a result) vs (*zhe*, “is open,” a state).

18.6 + — tricky uses of

after a verb makes **achievement** explicit: (“look for”) vs (“find”); vs (“accomplish”); vs (“succeed in buying”). Without , a verb can shade into “try to.”

Structure: Verb +

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yí dìng|must / |yào / |zhǎo dào|find it / 。 }

You must find it.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |méi|didn’t / |xiǎng dào|expect / |nǐ|you / |yě|too / |lái|came / |le / 。 }

I didn’t expect you’d come too.

Remember: stamps “achieved” onto the verb: (search) → (find), → (succeed in buying), → (think of / expect). A bare verb can mean just “try to.”

Watch out

- vs is the classic pair: (“searched for ages”) doesn’t say you (“found”) it.

18.7 + + + — “...ing this way and that”

Wrap one verb in ... to paint a **repeated, aimless** action — “...ing back and forth, over and over.” The same single-syllable verb repeats on both sides.

Structure: Verb + + (same) Verb +

{zh: |tā|he / |zài / |kǎo chǎng|the exam hall / |wài miàn|outside / |zǒu lái zǒu qù|paced back and forth / 。 }

He paced back and forth outside the exam hall.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |xiǎng lái xiǎng qù|thought it over and over / |dōu|still / |xiǎng bù míng bai|couldn’t work it out / 。 }

I thought it over and over but still couldn’t work it out.

Remember: VV = “back and forth, round and round” — the same one-syllable verb on both sides, painting restless repetition: (pacing), (mulling), (going on about it), (tossing and turning).

Watch out

- It carries a faintly *futile / restless* tone — lots of motion, often no result.

19 Conditional Statements

19.1 , — “once ... then ...”

... ... sets up a **trigger** — “once (something happens), then (consequence).” It looks ahead to a possible future turning point. Unlike (which links two *real* events in quick succession), frames a **hypothetical** threshold.

Structure: + Condition , (Subject) + Consequence

{zh: |yǒu xiē|some / |rén|people / |yí dàn|the moment / |yǒu|they have / |le / |qián|money / , |jiù|then / |biàn|change / |le / 。 }

Some people change the moment they have money.

{zh: |yí dàn|once / |nǐ|your / |de / |gōng sī|company / |shàng shì|goes public / , |nǐ|you / |jiù|then / |kě yǐ|can / |biàn chéng|become / |yǒu qián rén|rich / 。 }

Once your company goes public, you’ll be rich.

Remember: = “if/when ever X happens (then...)” — a **HYPOTHETICAL threshold**. Contrast (HSK 4), which chains two *actual* events in instant succession (). looks to a maybe-future; reports a real link.

Watch out

- is about a *possible* future turning point — don’t use it for a habitual or already-happened link (that’s).

20 Sentence Patterns

20.1 (advanced) — , , ,

Once the basic sentence clicks, these advanced moves come up constantly: + **Obj** + + **Verb** (spoken emphasis, optional); + **Obj** + / + ... (“treat / regard as”); ... (“not take seriously”); and **A** / **B** (“mistake A for B”).

Structure: + Obj + + VP · + Obj + / + ... · A + / + B

{zh: |wǒ|I / |bǎ / |zhè|this / |shì er|matter / |gěi / |wàng|forgot / |le / 。 }

I clean forgot about this.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yì zhí|have always / |bǎ / |tā|him / |kàn zuò|seen as / |wǒ|my / |gē ge|older brother / 。 }

I’ve always seen him as an older brother.

Remember: a toolkit — ...**V** (a spoken kick:), ... / ... (“treat/regard as”), ... (“not take seriously”), **A** / **B** (“mistake A for B”). All still “grab the object, then do something to it.”

Watch out

- The here is just emphasis — it doesn’t mean “give.”

20.2 Noun 1 + + Noun 2 + Adj. — “no more ... than”

is **not** . = “not as ... as” (definitely less); = “**no more** ... than” (we might even be equal). It directly negates .

Structure: Noun 1 + + Noun 2 + Adjective · A + + B + Verb + + Adj

{zh: |nǐ|you / |bù bǐ|no ... than / |wǒ|me / |chà|worse / 。 }

You’re no worse than me.

{zh: |tā|she / |tiào|dances / |de / |bù bǐ|no ... than / |míng xīng|a star / |chà|worse / 。 }

She dances no worse than a star.

Remember: = “**no more** ... than” (maybe equal); = “**not as** ... as” (definitely less). (“you’re *no worse* than me,” i.e. just as good). And don’t muddle (bùbǐ) with (bùbì, “needn’t”)!

Watch out

- quietly leaves room for “equal” — it denies “more,” not “the same.”

20.3 + + + — “if you’re going to ..., then ...”

+ **V** + + **V** lays down a **resolute** condition — “if you’re going to V, then V (and do it properly / now).” The tone is almost a command, so it usually drops the subject, with single-syllable verbs.

Structure: + Verb + + Verb

{zh: |yào|if you’re going to / |zǒu|leave / |jiù|then / |zǒu|leave / , |wǒ men|we / |bù|don’t / |xū yào|need / |nǐ|you / 。 }

If you’re leaving, then leave — we don’t need you.

{zh: |yào|if you’re going to / |xué|study it / |jiù|then / |hǎo hǎo|properly / |xué|study / 。 }

If you’re going to study it, study it properly.

Remember: VV = “if you’re gonna do it, then DO it (properly)” — resolute, command-like, usually subjectless (). Don’t mix it up with the indifferent VV (, “so be it”) later in this file.

Watch out

- The second verb can take a short modifier: , .

20.4 — “can’t do without”

means something is **indispensable or unavoidable** — “can’t do without, bound to involve.” It’s colloquial.

Structure: Subject + + Noun / Verb Phrase

{zh: |měi nián|every / |Chūn jié|New Year / , |shǎo bu liǎo|you can’t do without / |jiǎo zi|dumplings / 。 }

New Year just isn’t New Year without dumplings.

{zh: |huí jiā|getting home / |wǎn|late / |le / , |shǎo bu liǎo|there’s no escaping / |yí dùn|a / |mà|telling-off / 。 }

Get home late and a telling-off is guaranteed.

Remember: = “can’t be short of it” = **indispensable / inescapable** — the good kind () or the bad (, “a telling-off is guaranteed”).

Watch out

- is *liǎo* here — (“can’t do without”), not with a *le*.

20.5 A , B — “amounts to, is the same as”

equates two things — “equals, amounts to, is the same as.” Beyond maths, it draws an “as good as” equivalence, often an **unintended** one.

Structure: A , () B

{zh: |làng fèi|wasting / |shí jiān|time / |děng yú|is / |làng fèi|wasting / |shēng mìng|life / 。 }

Wasting time is wasting life.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |gào su|tell / |Xiǎo Wáng|Xiao Wang / |jiù / |děng yú|is as good as / |gào su|telling / |le / |dà jiā|everyone / 。 }

Telling Xiao Wang is as good as telling everyone.

Remember: = “= / as good as” — straight from maths (3+2 5) into “amounts to the same thing” (). Often a consequence you didn’t intend.

Watch out

- It draws an *equivalence*, not a cause — “X Y” says they amount to the same, not “X causes Y.”

20.6 + + — “from (a source), ... (gained)”

... marks the **source** from which knowledge or experience is drawn — “from (within) ..., (I gained)” It differs from ... (which spans time or place).

Structure: + Source + + Result

{zh: |wǒ|I / |cóng|from / |shū|books / |zhōng / |xué|learned / |dào / |le / |hěn duō|a lot / 。 }

I learned a lot from books.

{zh: |cóng|from / |zhè jiàn|this / |shì|matter / |zhōng / , |tā|he / |míng bai|saw / |le / |chéng shí|honesty’s / |de / |zhòng yào|importance / 。 }

From this, he saw the importance of honesty.

Remember: ... = “**from WITHIN (this source), I drew...**” — the well you take insight or information out of (,). Different from ... (a span from A to B).

Watch out

- The closes the bracket — ..., not a bare

20.7 + + + — “no ... to ...”

The formal frame + **Noun** + + **Verb** means there’s **nothing of that kind to do** — “no ... to ..., nothing to be ...” It’s a condensed, classical-flavoured

Structure: + Noun + + Verb

{zh: |wǒ|I / |hé|with / |tā|him / |wú huà kě shuō|have nothing to say / 。 }

I have nothing to say to him.

{zh: |gōng sī|the firm / |dǎo bì|folded / |le / , |tā|he / |wú lù kě zǒu|has nowhere to turn / 。 }

The firm folded — he’s nowhere to turn.

Remember: N V = “no N to V” (= literary). Learn the set four-character forms whole: (nothing to say), (nowhere to turn), (nowhere to go), (nothing to do).

Watch out

- Formal/literary — in speech you’d say

20.8 ... , — “not only ..., even ...”

This frame escalates: A, B ... — “not only A; even B (the extreme case) too.”

Structure: Subject + , + New Item + + Matching Situation

{zh: |tā|he / |bú dàn|not only / |bù|doesn’t / |zhī dào|know / |Lǐ Lián jié|Jet Li / , |shèn zhì lián|even / |Chéng Lóng|Jackie Chan / |yě / |bù|doesn’t / |zhī dào|know / 。 }

He doesn’t know Jet Li — he doesn’t even know Jackie Chan.

{zh: |nǐ|your / |nán péng you|boyfriend / |bú dàn|not only / |zuò hǎo|planned / |le / |gōng lüè|the trip / , |shèn zhì lián|even / |jī piào|the tickets / |yě / |mǎi hǎo|bought / |le / 。 }

He not only planned the trip — he even bought the tickets.

Remember: A, B ... = “not only A — *even* B!” It tops off ... by reaching for the most striking case (... , pulling in the ... “even” frame).

Watch out

- B should be the *more surprising* item — the escalation is the whole point.

/ / ... builds a modifier meaning “**(that is) related to ...**” / are casual (spoken); is formal.

Structure: / / + Topic + + Noun

{zh: |gēn|to do / |tā|him / |yǒu guān de|related / |shì qing|anything / , |wǒ|I / |dōu / |bù|don’t / |xiǎng|want to / |zhī dào|know / 。 }

Anything to do with him, I don’t want to know.

{zh: |yǔ|related to / |yì miáo|the vaccine / |yǒu guān de / |yán jiū|research / |yǐ jīng|already / |kāi shǐ|begun / |le / 。 }

Research related to the vaccine has already begun.

Remember: ... + **noun** = “**the noun (that’s) connected to ...**” The clips the whole “related to X” phrase onto the noun. Register: / (spoken) vs (formal).

Watch out

- Keep the — it’s what turns “related to X” into a modifier of the noun.

20.10 + () Noun Phrase — “so-called”

flags a term as “**so-called**” — putting it in mental scare-quotes. It’s often sceptical, but (unlike English) not always negative. The is optional.

Structure: + () + Noun Phrase

{zh: |méi yǒu|there’s no / |suǒ wèi|so-called / |de / |shī bài|failure / , |chú fēi|unless / |nǐ|you / |bù|don’t / |zài / |cháng shì|try again / 。 }

There’s no such thing as “failure,” unless you stop trying.

{zh: |zhè|this / |jiù shì|is / |nǐ|your / |suǒ wèi|so-called / |de / |bāng máng|“help” / ? }

Is this your so-called help?

Remember: = “so-called” (= **air-quotes**) — names a term while holding it at arm’s length (? “your *so-called* help?”). Often sceptical, not always damning; the is optional.

Watch out

- It questions the label, not necessarily the thing — context sets how sceptical it sounds.

... sets a **time limit** — “within (a period).” It’s a sandwich frame; the period can be precise or vague.

Structure: + Time +

{zh: |zài|in / |duǎn duǎn|just / |liǎng nián|two years / |nèi / , |tā|he / |jiù / |dāng shàng|became / |le / CEO / 。 }

In just two years, he became CEO.

{zh: |qǐng|please / |zài|within / |sān tiān|three days / |nèi / |huí fù|reply / 。 }

Please reply within three days.

Remember: + time + = a sandwich for “**within**” (= “inside three days”). The period can be exact () or loose (). Cousin of (HSK 5, file 07).

Watch out

- It brackets a *duration*, not a deadline point — “within three days,” not “by Friday.”

20.12 ... , / ... — “**would rather**”

states a **deliberate, costly choice**. A B = “would rather A than B” (A is the lesser evil); A B = “would rather A in order to still get B” (accept a cost for B).

Structure: + A , + B · + A , + B

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |nìng kě|would rather / |zǎo dào|arrive early / , |yě bù|than / |chí dào|be late / 。 }

We’d rather arrive early than late.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |nìng kě|would rather / |áo yè|stay up all night / , |yě yào|just to / |zuò wán|finish it / 。 }

I’d rather stay up all night just to finish it.

Remember: A B = “**rather A than B**” (B is the thing avoided); A B = “**rather A, just to still get B**” (B is the thing wanted, at A’s cost). The / flips which side is the goal.

Watch out

- rejects B; insists on B — opposite meanings hanging on one character.

20.13 + + — **expressing indifference**

Repeat a verb around to shrug a matter off — “(if it ...,) then so be it; fine, ... then.” It carries an “I don’t care” attitude.

Structure: Verb + + (same) Verb

{zh: |huài|broken / |le / |jiù|then / |huài|broken / |le / , |zài|just / |mǎi|buy / |xīn de|a new one / 。 }

If it’s broken, it’s broken — we’ll just buy a new one.

{zh: |zǒu|leave / |jiù|then / |zǒu|leave / , |wǒ|I / |zǎo jiù|long ago / |bù|didn’t / |xiǎng|want to / |gàn|do it / |le / ! }

Leave then — I’ve long wanted to quit anyway!

Remember: VV = a shrug, “so be it.” (“if it’s broken, it’s broken — whatever”). Don’t confuse it with VV (“if you’re going to V, then *really* V”) — that one’s resolute, this one’s indifferent.

Watch out

- Same verb both sides, with a “couldn’t care less” tone — , .

20.14 Action , + Purpose — “**so that, in order to**”

A clause-medial introduces the **purpose** of the preceding action — “so that, so as to.”

Structure: Action , + Purpose

{zh: |qǐng|please / |shuō|speak / |màn|slowly / |diǎnr|a bit / , |wǒ men|we / |hǎo|so that / |zuò|take / |bǐ jì|notes / 。 }

Please speak a little slower, so we can take notes.

{zh: |tā|she / |shuì qián|before bed / |hē|drinks / |niú nǎi|milk / , |hǎo|so as to / |rù shuì|fall asleep / 。 }

She drinks milk before bed to help her fall asleep.

Remember: this = “so that / so as to,” not “good.” It links an action to its purpose: (“speak slowly, *so that* we can take notes”). Think “do this, the better to...”.

Watch out

- Mid-clause + a verb = purpose; don’t read it as the adjective “good” there.

... ... describes **two simultaneous actions** — “while ..., (at the same time) ...” It’s a formal cousin of

Structure: + Verb 1 , + Verb 2

{zh: |tā|he / |xǐ huan|likes to / |yí miàn|while / |chī dōng xi|eating / , |yí miàn|at the same time / |kàn|watch / |diàn yǐng|films / 。 }

He likes to eat while watching films.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |yí miàn|while / |kū|crying / |yí miàn|at the same time / |pǎo|ran off / 。 }

I ran off crying.

Remember: = **the formal (“doing two things at once”)**. = “side,” same image as — one action on each side, simultaneously.

Watch out

- Reserve it for writing/formal speech; is the everyday version.

20.16 ... , ... — “either ... or ...”

A, B says it must be **one of two** — “(it’s) either A or B.” A and B can be verbs, adjectives, or nouns; it rules out any third option.

Structure: + A , + B

{zh: |tā|he / |zhěng tiān|all day / |bú shì|either / |dǎ yóu xì|games / |jiù shì|or / |shuì jiào|sleeping / 。 }

All day it’s either gaming or sleeping.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |mǎi|buy / |de / |yī fu|clothes / |bú shì|either / |dà|too big / |jiù shì|or / |xiǎo|too small / 。 }

The clothes I buy are either too big or too small.

Remember: **A B = “it’s either A or B (no third option)”** — often a bit exasperated (....., “always one or the other”). Don’t confuse it with A B (“not A but rather B”), which *corrects* to B.

Watch out

- narrows to two; replaces a wrong A with the right B — the second word (vs) tells them apart.

21 Complex Sentence Patterns

21.1 / — “no wonder”

(and its twin) expresses a **dawning realisation** — “no wonder, that’s why.” Some fresh piece of information has just made everything click. The two are interchangeable.

Structure: Reason , / + Observation

{zh: |Xiǎo Zhāng|Xiao Zhang / |qǐng jià|on leave / |le / , |guài bu de|no wonder / |jīn tiān|today / |méi|haven’t / |kàn dào|seen / |tā|him / 。 }

Xiao Zhang’s on leave — no wonder I haven’t seen him today.

{zh: |zhè|this / |yě / |nán guài|isn’t to blame / |tā|him / , |tā|he / |zhè me|so / |xiǎo|young / 。 }

You can’t really blame him — he’s so young.

Remember: = = **“no wonder!”** — read literally as “*can’t blame* it (given that...),” which is exactly why + a person also means “can’t really blame them” (, “you can hardly blame him”).

Watch out

- Both pair with the explaining fact — the reason comes first, then + what’s now explained.

22 Either... or

22.1 , — “either ... or ...”

Doubling lays out **two options** in a statement — “either ..., or ...” The options are usually verb phrases. (In a *question*, you’d switch to .)

Structure: + A , + B

{zh: |zhǐ yǒu|there’s only / |yí kuài|one piece of / |dàn gāo|cake / , |huò zhě|either / |nǐ|you / |chī|eat it / |huò zhě|or / |wǒ|I / |chī|eat it / 。 }

There’s only one piece of cake — either you eat it or I do.

{zh: |zán men|let’s / |huò zhě|either / |jīn tiān|today / |qù|go / |huò zhě|or / |míng tiān|tomorrow / |qù|go / , |yí dìng|definitely / |yào|must / |qù|go / 。 }

Let’s go either today or tomorrow — but we definitely must go.

Remember: = “either ... or ...” in a **STATEMENT** (laying out options); a *choice question* still takes . Same statement-vs-question split as the basic / pair (HSK 3).

Watch out

- Don’t slip into here — these are stated options, not a question being asked.

23 Let alone

23.1 , / — “let alone, never mind”

A, / B ... waves away the **bigger** case to stress that even the **smaller** one fails — “forget about A; even B” Note the order is the **reverse** of the pattern.

Structure: + A , / + B + / + Verb

{zh: |bié shuō|forget / |yì bǎi|a hundred / , |jiù shì|even / |yí kuài|one / |qián|kuai / |wǒ|I / |yě / |bù|won’t / |gěi|give / |nǐ|you / 。 }

Forget a hundred — I won’t even give you one kuai.

{zh: |bié shuō|never mind / |bái jiǔ|baijiu / , |lián|even / |pí jiǔ|beer / |wǒ|I / |dōu / |shòu bu liǎo|can’t stand / 。 }

Never mind baijiu — I can’t even stand beer.

Remember: = “forget the big thing — even the small one fails.” Dismiss the *bigger* case A first (), then show even the *smaller* B doesn’t hold (). Big → small. The exact reverse of (next).

Watch out

- Order matters: the *easier/smaller* case is what actually fails, proving the point about the bigger one.

23.2 , — “let alone, much less”

A ..., B runs from the **smaller** case up to the **greater** — “even A ..., let alone B.” A (the lesser) comes first; B (the more extreme) is capped with .

Structure: + A + / + Verb , + B +

{zh: |lián|even / |wǒ|I / |dōu / |bù|don’t / |zhī dào|know / |zhè ge|this / |gē shǒu|singer / , |gèng bú yòng shuō|let alone / |tā|him / |le / 。 }

Even I don’t know this singer, let alone him.

{zh: |lián|even / |jiā rén|family / |dōu / |bù|don’t / |lǐ jiě|understand / |nǐ|you / , |gèng bú yòng shuō|let alone / |bié rén|others / |le / 。 }

Even your family don’t understand you, let alone other people.

Remember: = “even A..., LET ALONE B.” Lesser case A first (), greater B capped with (). Small → big — the **opposite** order to (big → small). Both make the same point from different ends.

Watch out

- Pair it with a leading A ... — the “even the small case” half sets up the “let alone” punch.

24 Comparing similar adverbs

24.1 vs — “often”

Both mean “often” and overlap heavily as **adverbs**. The split is about word-class: can *also* be an **adjective** (“regular”: 常), and its negative is clean (不). 经常 is purely an adverb, and grates — use instead.

{zh: 我|I / 经常|often / 收到|get / 垃圾|spam / 短信|texts / 经常. }

I often get spam texts.

{zh: 她|her / 忘记|forgetting / 带|to bring / 钥匙|her keys / 是|is / 经常|a regular / 经常. / 是|thing / 经常. }

Forgetting her keys is a regular thing for her.

Remember: as adverbs, twins; only also works as an ADJECTIVE (常, “a regular occurrence”). And negate with 不 — never the clunky 不经常.

Watch out

- If it modifies a *noun* (名词), only 经常 fits.

25 Comparing similar auxiliary words

25.1 vs — “finally, at last”

Both mean “finally,” but the feeling differs. is **informal** and breathes **relief** — things finally worked out *acceptably*, often after worry or impatience. is more **neutral and objective**, for any long-awaited result (good *or* bad). rarely goes before the subject.

{zh: |děng|waited / |le / |hěn jiǔ|a long time / , |tā|he / |zǒng suàn|at last (relief) / |lái|came / |le / 。 }

After waiting ages, he’s finally here.

{zh: |jīng guò|after / |duō nián|years of / |nǚ lì|effort / , |wǒ men|we / |zhōng yú|finally / |chéng gōng|succeeded / |le / 。 }

After years of effort, we finally succeeded.

Remember: = “finally, *phe*w” (informal relief); = neutral “at last.” A *bad* ending takes , never : (“failed in the end”) ✓, but × — there’s no relief in failing.

Watch out

- Reach for only when the outcome is a *welcome* one you’d worried about.

26 Comparing similar conjunctions

26.1 vs — “with” vs “to / towards”

With , both work (/). But they part ways elsewhere. also means “**and** / **with**” — it *joins or compares* two things (..., ...). marks the **one-way target** of an attitude or action (..., ...), and it **can’t** join two nouns.

{zh: |wǒ|I / |gēn|like / |nǐ men|you all / |bù|not / |yí yàng|the same / , |wǒ|I / |hái yǒu|still have / |hái zi|kids / |ne / 。 }

I’m not like you — I’ve still got kids.

{zh: |nǐ|you / |yào|going to / |gēn|with / |wǒ|me / |yì qǐ|together / |qù|go / |ma / ? }

Are you coming with me?

Remember: JOINS (two-way): “and / with / same as” (..., ...); AIMS (one-way): “to / towards” (,). Picture as a link between equals, as an arrow at a target.

Watch out

- can’t join two nouns — “A and B” is / , never .

27 Comparing similar prepositions

27.1 vs vs — “towards, facing”

All three mark **direction**. **Before** a verb in plain directional use they’re interchangeable (/ /). **After** a verb (,), marks the **destination** and is the most common; marks direction; can’t go after a verb. Only stretches to abstract aims (...).

{zh: |wǎng / |qián|forward / |zǒu|walk / |shí|ten / |fēn zhōng|minutes / 。 }

Walk forward for ten minutes.

{zh: |zhè ge|this / |dì tiě|train / |shì|is / |kāi wǎng|bound for / |Pǔ dōng|Pudong / |jī chǎng|Airport / |de / |ma / ? }

Is this train bound for Pudong Airport?

Remember: before the verb, all three tie (//); after the verb, only (destination:) or — can’t follow a verb. And abstract “learn from / turn toward” is alone:

Watch out

- is the most restricted — keep it *before* the verb.

27.2 vs — “towards, regarding”

Near-synonyms for “towards / regarding.” is flexible and can mark a person you *act on* (“smile at him”). is more formal, frames only a **topic or object of attitude**, and can’t take a direct personal target. Rule of thumb: anywhere fits, fits too — not the reverse.

{zh: |duì yú|regarding / |zhè ge|this / |wèn tí|question / , |wǒ|I / |méi yǒu|have no / |kàn fǎ|view / 。 }

As for this question, I’ve no opinion.

{zh: |tā|he / |duì|at / |wǒ|me / |xiào|smiled / |le / 。 }

He smiled at me.

Remember: fits $\implies$ fits — but NOT the reverse. A personal target (, “smile at him”) needs ; only frames a topic/attitude (). When in doubt, is the safer, broader one.

Watch out

- Don’t put a person straight after as a target — ×, ✓.

27.3 vs vs — three “regarding”s

= the **topic / subject matter** (“about, on”); = the **target of an attitude** (“towards, regarding”); = a **transition** to a new topic (“as for, as to”).

{zh: |guān yú|about / |zhè|this / |běn / |shū|book / , |wǒ|I / |yǒu|have / |xiē / |xiǎng fǎ|thoughts / 。 }

About this book, I have some thoughts.

{zh: |zhì yú|as for / |jià gé|the price / , |yǐ hòu|later / |zài / |shuō|we’ll talk / 。 }

As for the price, we’ll discuss it later.

Remember: three jobs — = the **subject** (“about X”); = an **attitude aimed at X** (“towards X”); = a **switch to a new topic** (“as for X...”). Subject / attitude / topic-shift.

Watch out

- changes topic, it doesn’t just name one — don’t swap it in for .

27.4 vs — “for, to”

Both mean “for / to (someone).” marks the **recipient** of a concrete action (“call him”); marks the **beneficiary or reason**, more abstract (“happy for him”). can’t replace in a “hand-to / call” action.

{zh: |qǐng|please / |gěi|to / |wǒ|me / |ná|pass / |yì shuāng|a pair of / |kuài zi|chopsticks / 。 }

Please pass me a pair of chopsticks.

{zh: |wǒ men|we / |dōu|all / |wèi|for / |nǐ|you / |gāo xìng|are happy / 。 }

We’re all happy for you.

Remember: = the **RECIPIENT** of a concrete action (hand to / call); ; = the **BENEFICIARY or reason, abstract:** . Something physically goes *to* someone $\rightarrow$; you feel/act *on behalf of* someone $\rightarrow$.

Watch out

- sounds off for “call him” — a concrete handover/call wants .

28 Comparing similar time words

28.1 vs — “usually, ordinarily”

Both mean “usually / ordinarily” and are interchangeable as **adverbs**. The split: can *also* be an **adjective** meaning “ordinary, common” (); can’t.

{zh: |tā|he / |píng shí|normally / |hěn shǎo|rarely / |hē jiǔ|drinks / 。 }

He rarely drinks normally.

{zh: |zhè|this / |shì|is / |hěn|very / |píng cháng|ordinary / |de / |shì|thing / 。 }

This is a perfectly ordinary thing.

Remember: as adverbs, twins (“usually”); only doubles as an ADJECTIVE (“ordinary”:). stays an adverb — it can’t describe a noun.

Watch out

- For “an ordinary X,” only works (), never .

28.2 vs — “after, afterwards”

Both mean “after.” can stand **alone** meaning “in the future / from now on,” and follows a time or event. is a touch more **formal / written** and usually needs a preceding reference point. After a bare verb-event both work.

{zh: |bì yè|graduating / |yǐ hòu|after / , |wǒ|I / |xiǎng|want / |qù|to go / |guó wài|abroad / 。 }

After graduating, I want to go abroad.

{zh: |yǐ hòu|in future / |xiǎo xīn|careful / |diǎn / 。 }

Be more careful in future.

Remember: can stand ALONE = “from now on / in future” (); leans formal and needs a reference point in front of it. After a verb-event (/) both work; only floats free.

Watch out

- You can’t replace the standalone (“in future”) with — sounds incomplete.

29 Comparing similar verbs

29.1 vs — “it looks / it seems”

= “looks (like)” from **appearance or observation** (the sky, a face, a dish). = “it seems / apparently,” a **judgement or inference** the speaker draws, often sentence-initial.

{zh: |kàn qǐ lái|it looks like / |yào|about to / |xià yǔ|rain / |le / 。 }

It looks like rain.

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

It seems he’s not coming.

Remember: = what your EYES report (the sky looks like rain); = what your MIND concludes (“it seems... he’s not coming”). Appearance vs inference — is the “to the senses” tag; is “as I see it, ...”.

Watch out

- A visible look → ; a reasoned conclusion → . They aren’t freely swappable.

29.2 vs — “appear” vs “look”

Both touch on appearance. simply reports how something **looks**. says something **comes across / appears (more) ...** — usually implying a comparison or the impression it gives off, often with .

{zh: |chuān|wearing / |shàng / |zhè jiàn|this / |yī fu|outfit / , |tā|she / |xiǎn de|comes across as / |gèng|more / |nián qīng|young / |le / 。 }

In this outfit she comes across as younger.

{zh: |tā|he / |kàn qǐ lái|looks / |hěn|very / |lèi|tired / 。 }

He looks tired.

Remember: = plain “looks...”; = “comes ACROSS as (more)...” — an impression actively *given off*, usually by contrast and often with (, “makes her look younger”). = “show / reveal.”

Watch out

- implies *something creates* the impression (the outfit, the lighting); is a neutral observation.