Comparing similar prepositions

HSK 5 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.

朝 vs 向 vs 往 (towards)

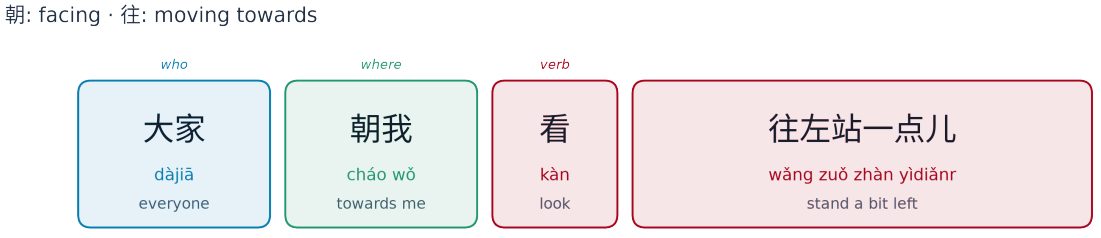
Which way to face?

- Your photographer friend arranges a group photo by the sea.
- **大家朝我看，往左站一点儿。** – "Everyone look towards me, and move a bit to the left."

朝, 向, 往 = towards

- **往 + direction + verb** = movement towards: 往前走, 往左拐, 往北开.
- **朝 + direction / person** = facing towards: 朝南的房间 (a south-facing room), 朝我笑.

这个房间朝南。
zhè ge fáng jiān cháo nán
Word guide: 这 – this; 个 – (measure word); 房间 – room; 朝 – faces; 南 – south.



向 is the widest

- **向** can do both: 向前走, 向他挥手 (wave to him).
- Only 向 is used for abstract "to": 向老师请教 (ask the teacher), 向你学习 (learn from you).

我们应该向他学习。
wǒ men yīng gāi xiàng tā xué xí
Word guide: 我们 – we; 应该 – should; 向 – from; 他 – him; 学习 – learn.

People and abstract actions

- 往 does not take people: 向他道歉, not 往他道歉.
- Abstract verbs (学习, 请教, 道歉, 表示) take 向, not 朝 or 往.

After the verb

- 往 / 向 can follow some verbs for a destination: 飞往上海 – "flying to Shanghai", 走向成功 – "head towards success".
- 朝 does not follow the verb this way.

这架飞机飞往上海。
zhè jià fēi jī fēi wǎng Shàng hǎi
Word guide: 这 – this; 架 – (measure word); 飞机 – plane; 飞往 – flies to; 上海 – Shanghai.

Recap

- **往** = movement towards a direction; **朝** = facing towards; **向** = both, plus abstract "to" with people.
- Abstract verbs (学习, 道歉) take 向; 飞往 / 走向 put the word after the verb.

Practise this pattern step by step.

对 vs 对于 (to/toward vs regarding)

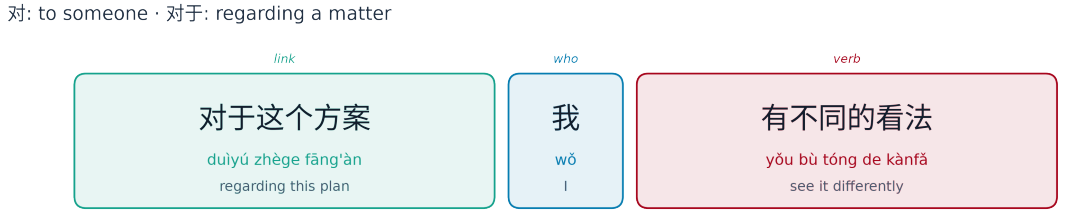
Kind to him, regarding the plan

- In a meeting, you describe a new colleague and give your view on a proposal.
- **他对大家很客气。对于这个方案，我有不同的看法。** – "He's very polite to everyone. Regarding this proposal, I see it differently."

对 = to, towards (people and attitudes)

- **对 + person** for attitudes and treatment: 对我很好, 对他很客气, 对孩子很耐心.
- Also before many fixed phrases: 对 … 感兴趣, 对 … 有好处.

老师对学生很耐心。
lǎo shī duì xué sheng hěn nài xīn
Word guide: 老师 – the teacher; 对 – to; 学生 – students; 很 – very; 耐心 – patient.



■ 对于 = regarding (issues and topics)

- **对于 + issue**, usually at the start: 对于这个问题，大家意见不一.
- 对于 is more formal and does not take people for treatment: 他对我很好, not 他对于我很好.

对于这个问题，大家意见不一。
duì yú zhè ge wèn tí dà jiā yì jiàn bù yī
Word guide: 对于 – regarding; 这个 – this; 问题 – issue; 大家 – everyone's; 意见 – opinions; 不一 – differ.

■ 对 can replace 对于, not the reverse

- Wherever 对于 works, 对 usually works too: 对 (于) 这个问题 ….
- But treatment of people needs 对: 对我很好, 对他说, not 对于我很好 / 对于他说.

■ 对 … 来说 and 对于 … 来说

- Both mean "for, as far as … is concerned": 对 (于) 学生来说，时间很重要.
- 对于 sounds more formal, suitable for essays.

对于学生来说，时间很重要。
duì yú xué sheng lái shuō shí jiān hěn zhòng yào
Word guide: 对于 – for; 学生 – students; 来说 – (as far as); 时间 – time; 很 – very; 重要 – important.

■ Recap

- **对** = to / towards (people, treatment, attitudes); **对于** = regarding (issues, formal).
- Check the construction rather than whether a person is named: 对于 can introduce a viewpoint about a person, but does not replace 对 in every attitude or treatment phrase.

Practise this pattern step by step.

关于 vs 对于 vs 至于

■ Three ways to bring up a topic

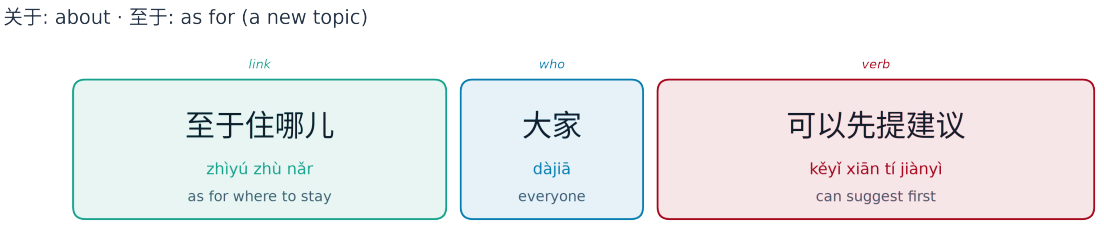
- You are writing an email planning a school trip.
- **关于出发时间，我们下周决定。至于住哪儿，大家可以先提建议。** – "As for the departure time, we'll decide next week. As for where to stay, everyone can make suggestions first."

■ 关于 = about (topic, content)

- **关于 + topic** introduces what something is about: 关于环境的文章, 关于这件事.
- It goes before the subject, never after it.

关于这件事，我不太清楚。

guān yú zhè jiàn shì wǒ bú tài qīng chu
Word guide: 关于 – about; 这件事 – this matter; 我 – I; 不太 – not very; 清楚 – clear.



■ 对于 = regarding (attitude) and 至于 = as for (a new topic)

- **对于 + issue** introduces something you have an opinion on: 对于这个决定，我很满意.
- **至于 + new topic** switches to a related but separate point: 我负责订票，至于酒店，你来选吧.

我负责订票，至于酒店，你来选吧。
wǒ fù zé dìng piào zhì yú jiǔ diàn nǐ lái xuǎn ba
Word guide: 我 – I; 负责 – am in charge of; 订票 – booking tickets; 至于 – as for; 酒店 – the hotel; 你 – you; 来 – (do it); 选 – choose.

■ 至于 needs a first topic

- 至于 comes after something else has been said; it cannot open a conversation.
- 关于 cannot follow the subject: 关于这件事，我 …, not 我关于这件事 ….

■ Choosing

- Title or content: 关于. Attitude or judgement: 对于. Switching to another point: 至于.
- **至于结果怎么样，我们以后再说。** – "As for how it turns out, we'll see later."

至于结果怎么样，以后再说。
zhì yú jié guǒ zěn me yàng yǐ hòu zài shuō
Word guide: 至于 – as for; 结果 – the result; 怎么样 – how it turns out; 以后 – later; 再说 – we'll see.

■ Recap

- **关于** = about (topic); **对于** = regarding (attitude); **至于** = as for (switching to a new point).
- 至于 needs an earlier topic; 关于 goes before the subject.

Practise this pattern step by step.

给 vs 为 (to/for vs for the sake of)

A gift and a sacrifice

- Your mother works late every night to support the family.
- **妈妈为了我们每天工作到很晚，我想给她买一份礼物。** – "Mum works late every day for us; I want to buy her a present."

给 = to / for (a recipient)

- **给 + person + verb** = do something for / to someone who receives it: 给她买礼物, 给我打电话, 给你介绍.
- The person gets the thing or the service.

我给妈妈买了一束花。
wǒ gěi mā ma mǎi le yí shù huā
Word guide: 我 – I; 给 – for; 妈妈 – Mum; 买 – buy; 一束 – a bunch of; 花 – flowers.



为 = for the sake of, because of

- **为 + person / cause + verb** = for the sake of, on behalf of: 为大家服务, 为你高兴, 为孩子担心.
- 为 often goes with feelings and effort.

我们都为你高兴。
wǒ men dōu wèi nǐ gāo xìng
Word guide: 我们 – we; 都 – all; 为 – for; 你 – you; 高兴 – are happy.

Receiving versus caring

- 给 + person = they receive something: 给他写信. 为 + person = on their behalf or about them: 为他担心.
- Feelings take 为, not 给: 我为你高兴, not 我给你高兴.

■ Where both work

- "Do something for someone" can sometimes take either: 给 / 为大家做饭.
- 给 is more everyday; 为 sounds more formal or dedicated: 为人民服务 – "serve the people".

为人民服务。
wèi rén mín fú wù
Word guide: 为 – for; 人民 – the people; 服务 – serve.

■ Recap

- **给** = to / for a recipient (给她买, 给我打电话); **为** = for the sake of / because of (为你高兴, 为孩子担心).
- Feelings take 为; service can take either (给 everyday, 为 formal).

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 朝 vs 向 vs 往 (towards)

2701.1 Complete: "We should learn from her." 我们应该 …… 她学习。

2701.2 Which is wrong?

- A. 向他道歉
- B. 往他道歉
- C. 往前走
- D. 朝南的窗户

2701.3 Build: "This plane flies to Shanghai."

Arrange all chunks: 飞往 / 这架飞机 / 上海。

2701.4 朝南的房间 means a south-facing room.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2701.5 Your photographer friend arranges a group photo by the sea. 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.

■ 对 vs 对于 (to/toward vs regarding)

2702.1 Complete: "She is very kind to me." 她 …… 我很好。

2702.2 Which is wrong?

- A. 对这个问题，我没有意见。
- B. 他对我很客气。
- C. 对于这个问题，我没有意见。

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- D. 他对于我很客气。

2702.3 Build: “Regarding this issue, opinions differ.”

Arrange all chunks: 大家意见 / ， / 不一。/ 对于这个问题

2702.4 对于 … 来说 is more formal than 对 … 来说.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2702.5 In a meeting, you describe a new colleague and give your view on a proposal. 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.

■ 关于 vs 对于 vs 至于

2703.1 Complete: “I’ll book the tickets; as for the hotel, you choose.” 我负责订票，…… 酒店，你来选吧。

2703.2 A book title: “A Book about Chinese Food”. Which word fits? 《_____ 中国菜的书》

- A. 至于
- B. 关于
- C. 对于
- D. 对

2703.3 Match each word to its job.

- 1. 关于
- 1. 对于
- 1. 至于
- A. regarding (attitude or judgement)
- B. as for (switching to another point)
- C. about (topic or content)

2703.4 至于 can open a conversation without any earlier topic.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2703.5 You are writing an email planning a school trip. 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.

■ 给 vs 为 (to/for vs for the sake of)

2704.1 Complete: “We’re all happy for you.” 我们都 …… 你高兴。

2704.2 “Call me tomorrow.” Which fits? 明天 _____ 我打电话。

- A. 给
- B. 为
- C. 向
- D. 对

2704.3 Build: “I bought Mum a bunch of flowers.”

Arrange all chunks: 我 / 买了 / 给妈妈 / 一束花。

2704.4 为人民服务 sounds more formal than 给人民服务.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2704.5 Your mother works late every night to support the family. 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.

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Answers and explanations

■ 朝 vs 向 vs 往 (towards)

2701.1 向

Abstract "learn from" takes 向.

2701.2 B. 往他道歉

往 shows direction of movement toward a place (往前走) and does not take a person. Apologising to someone uses 向 or 跟: 向他道歉.

2701.3 这架飞机飞往上海。

Verb + 往 + destination.

2701.4 True.

True. 朝 means "facing towards": 朝南的房间 is a south-facing room.

2701.5 One possible response: 大家朝我看，往左站一点儿。

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 does not take people: 向他道歉, not 往他道歉.
- Abstract verbs (学习, 请教, 道歉, 表示) take 向, not 朝 or 往.
- 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.

■ 对 vs 对于 (to/toward vs regarding)

2702.1 对

Treatment of people takes 对.

2702.2 D. 他对于我很客气。

Treatment of people needs 对, not 对于.

2702.3 对于这个问题，大家意见不一。

对于 + issue, then the comment.

2702.4 True.

True. 对于 … 来说 is more formal and suits essays; 对 … 来说 is the everyday form. Both mean "for, as far as … is concerned".

2702.5 One possible response: 他对大家很客气。对于这个方案，我有不同的看法。

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.

- Wherever 对于 works, 对 usually works too: 对 (于) 这个问题 ….
- But treatment of people needs 对: 对我很好, 对他说, not 对于我很好 / 对于他说.
- 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.

■ 关于 vs 对于 vs 至于

2703.1 至于

至于 switches to a new, related point.

2703.2 B. 关于

Content and titles take 关于.

2703.3 1–C: 关于 = about (topic or content); 2–A: 对于 = regarding (attitude or judgement); 3–B: 至于 = as for (switching to another point)

Each introduces a topic differently.

2703.4 False.

It switches from a topic already mentioned.

2703.5 One possible response: 关于出发时间，我们下周决定。至于住哪儿，大家可以先提建议。

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.
- 至于 comes after something else has been said; it cannot open a conversation.
- 关于 cannot follow the subject: 关于这件事，我 …, not 我关于这件事 ….
- 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.

■ 给 vs 为 (to/for vs for the sake of)

2704.1 为

Feelings take 为.

2704.2 A. 给

The recipient of a call takes 给.

2704.3 我给妈妈买了一束花。

给 + person + verb + object.

2704.4 True.

为 is the formal, dedicated “for”.

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2704.5 One possible response: 妈妈为了我们每天工作到很晚，我想给她买一份礼物。

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.
- 给 + person = they receive something: 给他写信. 为 + person = on their behalf or about them: 为他担心.
- Feelings take 为, not 给: 我为你高兴, not 我给你高兴.
- 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.