Comparing similar time words

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.

平时 vs 平常 (usually / ordinary)

Usually, but not today

- Your grandfather normally goes to bed at nine, but tonight is New Year's Eve.
- **爷爷平时九点就睡了，今天却一直等到十二点。** – "Grandpa usually goes to bed at nine, but today he waited up until midnight."

平时 = usually, in ordinary times (a time word)

- **平时** contrasts ordinary days with a special time: 平时很忙，周末才有空.
- It can be a noun: 跟平时一样 – "the same as usual".

他平时很忙，周末才有空。
tā píng shí hěn máng zhōu mò cái yǒu kòng
Word guide: 他 – he; 平时 – usually; 很 – very; 忙 – busy; 周末 – at weekends; 才 – only then; 有空 – is free.



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■ 平常 = usual, ordinary (adjective and time word)

- **平常** can mean "usually" like 平时: 我平常七点起床.
- It can also be an adjective: "ordinary, common": 这是很平常的事 – "This is a very ordinary thing."

这是很平常的事。
zhè shì hěn píng cháng de shì
Word guide: 这 – this; 是 – is; 很 – very; 平常 – ordinary; 事 – thing.

■ Only 平常 is an adjective

- "Ordinary" takes 平常: 很平常, 平常的生活. Not 很平时.
- Both can mean "usually"; 平时 contrasts more clearly with a special occasion.

■ Versus 通常

- 通常 = generally, as a rule, a little more formal: 银行通常九点开门.
- 平时 / 平常 are more about personal routine.

银行通常九点开门。
yín háng tōng cháng jiǔ diǎn kāi mén
Word guide: 银行 – banks; 通常 – generally; 九点 – at nine; 开门 – open.

■ Recap

- **平时** = usually, ordinary times (time word / noun); **平常** = usually, or "ordinary" (adjective).
- "Ordinary" = 平常 only; 通常 = as a rule.

Practise this pattern step by step.

以后 vs 之后 (after / afterwards)

■ In a formal report

- You are writing up what happened after a company meeting.
- **会议结束之后，经理宣布了新的计划。** – "After the meeting ended, the manager announced the new plan."

■ 以后 and 之后 = after

- **X + 以后 / 之后** both mean "after X": 下课以后 / 下课之后.
- 之后 sounds a little more formal and written.

毕业之后，他去了上海。
bì yè zhī hòu tā qù le Shàng hǎi
Word guide: 毕业 – graduation; 之后 – after; 他 – he; 去 – went to; 上海 – Shanghai.

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...之后: after (formal 以后)



■ Alone at the start

- **之后** can start a sentence meaning "afterwards": 我们先去了博物馆。之后，我们去吃饭。
- **以后** alone at the start usually means "in the future, from now on": 以后我会注意.

之后，我们去吃饭。
zhī hòu wǒ men qù chī fàn
Word guide: 之后 – afterwards; 我们 – we; 去 – went; 吃饭 – to eat.

■ Past "afterwards" versus future "from now on"

- "Afterwards" in a past story: 之后 (or 后来), not a bare 以后.
- "From now on": 以后, not 之后: 以后别迟到了.

■ With a time span

- Both follow a duration: 三天以后 / 三天之后 = three days later.
- 之后 also pairs with 不久: 不久之后 – "not long after".

不久之后，他就回国了。
bù jiǔ zhī hòu tā jiù huí guó le
Word guide: 不久 – not long; 之后 – after; 他 – he; 就 – then; 回国 – returned home.

■ Recap

- **X 以后 / X 之后** = after X; 之后 is more formal.
- Alone: **之后** = afterwards (past); **以后** = in the future, from now on.

Practise this pattern step by step.

Practice without the models

■ 平时 vs 平常 (usually / ordinary)

2801.1 Complete: "This is a very ordinary thing." 这是很 …… 的事。

2801.2 Which is wrong?

- A. 跟平时一样。

- B. 这是很平时的事。
- C. 他平时很忙。
- D. 他平常很忙。

2801.3 Build: “He’s usually busy; only at weekends is he free.”

Arrange all chunks: 才有空。 / 他平时很忙 / ， / 周末

2801.4 通常 is a little more formal than 平时.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2801.5 Your grandfather normally goes to bed at nine, but tonight is New Year’s Eve. 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.

■ 以后 vs 之后 (after / afterwards)

2802.1 Past story: “We went to the museum. Afterwards, we ate.” 我们去了博物馆。……，我们去吃饭。

2802.2 “From now on, please don’t be late.” Which fits? _____ 请别迟到了。

- A. 后来
- B. 然后
- C. 之后
- D. 以后

2802.3 Build: “Not long after, he returned home.”

Arrange all chunks: ， 他 / 就 / 不久之后 / 回国了。

2802.4 下课以后 and 下课之后 mean the same.

True or false? Explain or repair the statement.

2802.5 You are writing up what happened after a company meeting. Close the examples. Say a Mandarin response, then write it in Chinese. Explain briefly in English what the lesson’s pattern adds. Compare with the model, then change one detail and try again.

Write or say your own response before reading the key.

Answers and explanations

■ 平时 vs 平常 (usually / ordinary)

2801.1 平常

Only 平常 is an adjective meaning "ordinary".

2801.2 B. 这是很平时的事。

平时 is a time noun ("usually, ordinary times"), not an adjective, so 很平时的事 is wrong. The adjective "ordinary" is 平常: 很平常的事.

2801.3 他平时很忙，周末才有空。

平时 contrasts with the weekend.

2801.4 True.

True. 通常 ("as a rule, normally") is slightly more formal than 平时 and often states general patterns.

2801.5 One possible response: 爷爷平时九点就睡了，今天却一直等到十二点。

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.
- "Ordinary" takes 平常: 很平常, 平常的生活. Not 很平时.
- Both can mean "usually"; 平时 contrasts more clearly with a special occasion.
- 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.

■ 以后 vs 之后 (after / afterwards)

2802.1 之后

Afterwards in a past story: 之后.

2802.2 D. 以后

以后 alone means "from now on, in future": 以后请别迟到了. 之后 needs a reference event (下课之后), 后来 is only for the past, and 然后 means "and then".

2802.3 不久之后，他就回国了。

不久之后 + clause.

2802.4 True.

After a clause, both mean "after".

2802.5 One possible response: 会议结束之后，经理宣布了新的计划。

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.

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- “Afterwards” in a past story: 之后 (or 后来), not a bare 以后.
- “From now on”: 以后, not 之后: 以后别迟到了.
- 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.