

Comparing similar verbs

Ref Hsk5 Grammar

看起来 vs 看来 — “it looks / it seems”

看起来 = “looks (like)” from **appearance or observation** (the sky, a face, a dish).

看来 = “it seems / apparently,” a **judgement or inference** the speaker draws, often sentence-initial.

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

It looks like rain.

{zh: 看来 |kàn lái|it seems / 他 |tā|he / 不 |bù|isn't / 来 |lái|coming / 了 |le / 。 }

It seems he's not coming.

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

Watch out

- A visible look → 看起来; a reasoned conclusion → 看来. They aren't freely swappable.

显得 vs 看起来 — “appear” vs “look”

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

{zh: 穿 |chuān|wearing / 上 |shàng / 这件 |zhè jiàn|this / 衣服 |yī fu|outfit / , 她 |tā|she / 显得 |xiǎn de|comes across as / 更 |gèng|more / 年轻 |nián qīng|young / 了 |le / 。 }

In this outfit she comes across as younger.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 看起来 |kàn qǐ lái|looks / 很 |hěn|very / 累 |lèi|tired / 。 }

He looks tired.

Remember: **看起来** = plain “looks...”; **显得** = “comes ACROSS as (more)...” — an impression actively *given off*, usually by contrast and often with 更 (这件衣服显得更年轻, “makes her look younger”). 显 = “show / reveal.”

Watch out

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