

Particles

Ref Hsk6 Grammar

是否 + 动词 / 形容词 — “whether (or not)”

是否 is a formal, written **是不是** — “whether (or not).” It forms or embeds a yes-no question, before a verb or adjective.

Structure: 是否 + Verb / Adjective

{zh: 请 |qǐng|please / 确认 |què rèn|confirm / 信息 |xìn xī|the details / 是否 |shì fǒu|whether / 正确 |zhèng què|correct / 。 }

Please confirm whether the details are correct.

{zh: 你 |nǐ|your / 父母 |fù mǔ|parents / 是否 |shì fǒu|whether / 同意 |tóng yì|agree to / 你们 |nǐ men|you / 住 |zhù|living / 在一起 |zài yì qǐ|together / ? }

Do your parents agree to you living together?

Remember: 是否 = the written 是不是 (“whether”). Same job, formal register — natural in a form or report, stiff in chat (where you’d say 是不是).

Watch out

- It sits before the verb/adjective: 是否正确, not 正确是否 (that “...or not” tail is 与否, below).

动词 / 形容词 + 与否 — “whether or not”

与否 is a classical particle for “... or not” — it nominalises a yes-no question into an abstract phrase, sitting at the end of a clause. It’s highly formal.

Structure: Verb / Adjective + 与否

{zh: 成功 |chéng gōng|success / 与否 |yǔ fǒu|or not / , 要 |yào / 靠 |kào|is down to / 自己 |zì jǐ|yourself / 。 }

Whether or not you succeed is down to you.

{zh: 这 |zhè|this / 件 |jiàn / 事 |shì|matter / 重要 |zhòng yào|important / 与否 |yǔ fǒu|or not / , 取决于 |qǔ jué yú|depends on / 你 |nǐ|how you / 怎么 |zěn me / 看 |kàn|see it / 。 }

Whether this matters depends on how you see it.

Remember: 与否 = “... or not,” tacked on the **END** to make a topic — 成功与否 (“the matter of whether you succeed”). It turns a yes-no question into a noun-like phrase. Highly formal; 是否 leads, 与否 trails.

Watch out

- It comes *after* the verb/adjective (成功与否) — the front-position version is 是否.

名词 + 之 + 名词 — literary 的

之 is the **classical** / **written** equivalent of possessive 的, found in set phrases, titles, and formal documents. It can't replace every 的 — it's fixed to certain pairings.

Structure: Noun + 之 + Noun

{zh: 害人 |hài rén|to harm others / 之 |zhī / 心 |xīn|a mind / 不可有 |bù kě yǒu|one must not have / 。 }

Never mean harm to others.

{zh: 这些 |zhè xiē|these / 方式 |fāng shì|methods / 仍 |réng|still / 有 |yǒu|have / 不足 |bù zú|short- / 之 |zhī / 处 |chù|comings / 。 }

These methods still have shortcomings.

Remember: 之 = the literary 的 — but *fixed* to set expressions, not a free swap: 三分之一 (a third), 意料之中 (as expected), 不足之处 (shortcomings). Learn the phrases whole.

Watch out

- You can't sprinkle 之 in for any 的 — 我之书 is wrong; it's 我的书.

Statement + 嘛 — “obviously, of course”

The particle 嘛 marks something as **self-evident** from the speaker's point of view — “obviously, of course.” (Same sound as the yes-no 吗, but a different job.)

Structure: Statement + 嘛

{zh: 不 |bù|if you don't / 想 |xiǎng|want to / 去 |qù|go / 就 |jiù|then / 不要 |bú yào|don't / 去 |qù|go / 嘛 |ma / 。 }

If you don't want to go, then don't — obviously.

{zh: 他 |tā|he / 挺 |tǐng|pretty / 有钱 |yǒu qián|well-off / 的 |de / 嘛 |ma / 。 }

He's clearly pretty well-off.

Remember: 嘛 = “obviously, of course” — frames the point as self-evident (不想去就不要去嘛, “then just don’t go, *obviously*”). Same sound as the question 吗, opposite job: 嘛 *asserts*, 吗 *asks*.

Watch out

- Don’t mishear it as 吗 — 嘛 makes a (slightly impatient) statement, not a question.

Sentence + 呗 — “(so) obviously, then”

The casual particle 呗 signals that something is **obvious or simply how it is** — “well, obviously; then just ...; so be it.” It can also carry resignation or a lack of enthusiasm.

Structure: Sentence + 呗

{zh: 不会 |bú huì|if you can’t / 就 |jiù|then / 好好 |hǎo hǎo|just / 学 |xué|learn it / 呗 |bei / 。 }

If you can’t, then just learn it — simple.

{zh: 不 |bù|if you don’t / 想 |xiǎng|want to / 去 |qù|go / 就 |jiù|then / 不 |bù|don’t / 去 |qù|go / 呗 |bei / 。 }

If you don’t want to go, then don’t, then.

Remember: 呗 = a shrug: “well, obviously / then just... / so be it.” Very colloquial, often a touch resigned (不会就学呗, “if you can’t, then just learn it — what else”). It waves the matter away as plain.

Watch out

- It’s very casual and can sound dismissive — read the resignation in its tone.