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LANGUAGES · CHEAT SHEET

Chinese sentence structure cheat sheet

Slot order, topic first and 12 core patterns with HSK 3.0 levels

1 The slot order: details go before the verb

Who	When	Where	Do	What
我 *wǒ*	每天晚上 *měitiān wǎnshang*	在家 *zài jiā*	学 *xué*	中文 *Zhōngwén*
I	every evening	at home	study	Chinese

2 Where the details go

Time	After the subject or first, never last: 明天我去北京。*Míngtiān wǒ qù Běijīng.* (Tomorrow I'm going to Beijing.)
Place with 在	Before the verb: 我明天在家工作。*Wǒ míngtiān zài jiā gōngzuò.* (I'm working from home tomorrow.)
住, 坐, 走	Place after the verb: 我们住在中国。*Wǒmen zhù zài Zhōngguó.* (We live in China.)
Duration	After the verb: 我去年在北京学习了三个月。*Wǒ qùnián zài Běijīng xuéxíle sān gè yuè.* (Last year I studied in Beijing for three months.)
Questions	Same order: 你什么时候去北京？*Nǐ shénme shíhou qù Běijīng?* (When are you going to Beijing?)

3 Topic first, adjectives

Topic, comment	水果，我最爱吃草莓。*Shuǐguǒ, wǒ zuì ài chī cǎoméi.* (As for fruit, I like strawberries best.)
Before the noun	新书 *xīn shū* (a new book) · 很贵的书 *hěn guì de shū* (a very expensive book)
As the predicate	No 是: 她很高。*Tā hěn gāo.* (She's tall.)
Phrase order	Owner → this/that + number + measure word → adjective → noun: 我的那两本新书 *wǒ de nà liǎng běn xīn shū* (those two new books of mine)

4 English-style mistakes

Mistake	Not	Say
Place after the verb	我学习在图书馆。	我在图书馆学习。*Wǒ zài túshūguǎn xuéxí.* (I study at the library.)
Time at the end	我去北京明天。	我明天去北京。*Wǒ míngtiān qù Běijīng.* (I'm going to Beijing tomorrow.)
是 before adjective	我是忙。	我很忙。*Wǒ hěn máng.* (I'm busy.)
把 with a bare verb	我把书放。	我把书放在桌子上了。*Wǒ bǎ shū fàng zài zhuōzi shang le.* (I put the book on the table.)
Question word at the front	什么你想吃?	你想吃什么？*Nǐ xiǎng chī shénme?* (What do you want to eat?)

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5 12 core patterns by HSK 3.0 level

Pattern	Example	Level
是 sentence · A + 是 + B	我是学生。*Wǒ shì xuésheng.* (I'm a student.)	1
Adjective predicate · Subject + 很 + adjective	她很高。*Tā hěn gāo.* (She's tall.)	1
有 sentence · Subject + 有 + object	我有一个哥哥。*Wǒ yǒu yí gè gēge.* (I have an older brother.)	1
Existence · Place + 有 + number + measure word + noun	桌子上有一本书。*Zhuōzi shang yǒu yì běn shū.* (There's a book on the table.)	1
Questions · Statement + 吗 · question word · verb + 不 + verb	你去哪儿？*Nǐ qù nǎr?* (Where are you going?) · 你去不去？*Nǐ qù bu qù?* (Are you going?)	1
Serial verbs · Subject + verb 1 (+ object) + verb 2 (+ object)	我去商店买东西。*Wǒ qù shāngdiàn mǎi dōngxi.* (I'm going to the store to buy some things.)	1
Double object · Subject + verb + person + thing	他教我们中文。*Tā jiāo wǒmen Zhōngwén.* (He teaches us Chinese.)	1
Topic type · Topic + subject + predicate	他身体很好。*Tā shēntǐ hěn hǎo.* (He's in good health.)	2
Comparison with 比 · A + 比 + B + adjective	今天比昨天热。*Jīntiān bǐ zuótiān rè.* (Today is hotter than yesterday.)	2
是……的 · Subject + 是 + detail + verb + 的	我是坐飞机来的。*Wǒ shì zuò fēijī lái de.* (I came by plane.)	2
把 sentence · Subject + 把 + object + verb + place / result	我把书放在桌子上了。*Wǒ bǎ shū fàng zài zhuōzi shang le.* (I put the book on the table.)	3
被 passive · Subject + 被 + doer + verb + something else	蛋糕被弟弟吃了。*Dàngāo bèi dìdi chī le.* (The cake got eaten by my little brother.)	3

6 A 把 sentence needs something after the verb

A place	我把书放**在桌子上**了。*Wǒ bǎ shū fàng zài zhuōzi shang le.* (I put the book on the table.)
A second object	我把钱还**给他**了。*Wǒ bǎ qián huán gěi tā le.* (I gave the money back to him.)
A result	我把作业做**完**了。*Wǒ bǎ zuòyè zuòwán le.* (I finished my homework.)

TIP

Self-check: find the verb. When, where and how go in front of it; only the object, a duration or a result goes after.