

## The Usage of 了 (le)

### 了<sub>1</sub> (Verb-suffix 了): action complete

Here comes the tricky part. **Does action complete means past tense?**

The answer is **NO!** For example, "I didn't do it." which is past tense; however, the action has not finished, right? So please do not consider 了<sub>1</sub> as past tense.

### Basic structure: S + V + 了 + (O)

他吃了飯/他吃了饭

Tā chīle fàn.

He had a meal. (It emphasizes that the action 'eat' has been finished.)

我睡了覺/我睡了觉

Wǒ shuìle jiào.

I slept. (It also emphasizes the status that I am awake now. The sleeping is finished.)

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (I took a shower.)

### Related structure 1:

#### S + V + 了 + Number + Measure Word + O

他昨天吃了兩碗飯/他昨天吃了两碗饭

Tā zuótiān chīle liǎng wǎn fàn.

He ate two bowls of rice.

我喝了五杯水/我喝了五杯水

Wǒ hēle wǔ bēi shuǐ.

I drank 5 glasses of water.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (I read three books.)

### Related structure 2:

#### S + V + 了 + Time spent (的 de + O)

他昨天晚上看了兩個鐘頭的電視/他昨天看了两个钟头的电视

Tā zuótiān wǎnshàng kànle liǎng ge zhōngtóu de diànshì.

He watched 2 hours of TV last night.

他跟他男朋友交往了七年/他跟他男朋友交往了七年

Tā gēn tā nán péngyǒu jiāwǎngle qīnián.

He was in a relationship with his boyfriend for seven years.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

(I spent 3 hours reading a book this morning.)

#### 了<sub>2</sub> (Sentence particle 了)

**It indicates a new situation happened (it wasn't like this, but "now" is)**

**Basic structure: S + V or Adj + (O) + le**

他吃飯了/他吃饭了

Tā chī fànle.

He had a meal.

(It emphasizes the situation has changed. He hasn't had a meal before, but he had one now.)

王先生五年前很胖，現在瘦了/王先生五年前很胖，現在瘦了

Wáng xiānshēng wǔ nián qián hěn pàng, xiànzài shòule.

Mr. Wang was fat 5 years ago but now is thinner.

("thin" is the new state that changed. He wasn't thin but now is thin.)

學中文的人多了/学中文的人多了

Xué zhōngwén de rén duōle

More people are learning Mandarin now.

(There are not many people learning Mandarin before, but now the statement changed.)

東西都貴了/东西都贵了

Dōngxī dōu guìle./ Dōngxi dōu guìle.

Things are getting expensive now

(It wasn't expensive before)



Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (I can speak Chinese now!)



Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (5) \_\_\_\_\_ (I got it. I didn't understand it before)

### Related structures:

#### 1. The situation will be changed soon

快 kuài + V/Adj ...了/ 快要 kuàiyào + V ...了/ 就要 jiùyào + V ...了/ 要 yào + V/Adj ...了

他的生日快到了

Tā de shēngrì kuài dào le.

His birthday is coming soon.

天快黑了

Tiān kuài hēi le.

It's almost getting dark.

他要睡覺了/他要睡觉了

Tā yào shuìjiào le.

He is going to sleep soon.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (6) \_\_\_\_\_ (I am going to take a bath soon.)

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (7) \_\_\_\_\_ (It's going to rain soon.)

## 2. Not anymore

已經/已经 yǐjīng + 不 bù/沒 méi + Verb + 了

他已經不愛你了/他已经不爱你了

Tā yǐjīng bú ài nǐle

He doesn't love you anymore.

我已經不學中文了/我已经不学中文了

Wǒ yǐjīng bù xué zhōngwénle

I don't learn Chinese anymore.

我已經沒錢了/我已经没钱了

Wǒ yǐjīng méi qiánle

I don't have money anymore.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (8) \_\_\_\_\_

(My father doesn't eat meat anymore.)

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (9) \_\_\_\_\_

(I don't have time anymore.)

## 3. Stop doing something

別 bié + V(O) + 了

別哭了


Bié kūle!

Don't cry!

別喝了!

Bié hēle.

Stop drinking!

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (10) \_\_\_\_\_ (Stop using your cellphone.)

## Let's Compare These Two 了

下雨了 Xià yǔ le

VS

下了雨 Xià le yǔ



我不吃飯/我不吃饭 Wǒ bù chīfàn

VS

我不吃飯了/我不吃饭了 Wǒ bù chīfànle

<p>了<sub>1</sub></p> <p>Cause there's no action be completed</p> <p><u>我不吃飯 Wǒ bù chīfàn</u></p> <p>i won't eat! (it's my decision)</p> 	<p>了<sub>2</sub> (new situation)</p> <p><u>我不吃飯了 Wǒ bù chīfànle</u></p> <p>i won't eat anymore!</p> <p>(i was plannig to eat, but now i chang my mind.)</p> 
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你吃了飯嗎/你吃了饭吗 Nǐ chīle fàn ma

VS

你吃飯了嗎/你吃饭了吗 Nǐ chīfànle ma

<p>了<sub>1</sub> (action complete)</p> <p><u>你吃了飯嗎? Ni chīle fàn ma?</u></p> <p>Have you finished eating?</p> <p>(Have you complete the action of eating?)</p> 	<p>了<sub>2</sub> (New situaiton)</p> <p><u>你吃飯了嗎? Ni chīfànle ma?</u></p> <p>Have you eaten?</p> <p>(You are checking the situation has been changed or not)</p> 
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○ Chinese people usually won't use 你吃了飯嗎/你吃了饭吗 to adults, as it considers a little bit rude. If you are talking to adults, you should say 你吃完飯了嗎/你吃完饭了吗.

## 了 3 (Set structure 了 ): To express excessiveness

### Basic structure:

太 tài + Adj. +了 / Adj. +死 sǐ +了 / Adj. +極/极 jí +了

王先生太胖了

Wáng xiānshēng tài pàngle!

Mr. Wang is too fat!

今天熱死了/今天热死了

Jīntiān rè sǐle!

Today is too hot!

我真的累極了/我真的累极了

Wǒ zhēn de lèi jíle!

I am really burned out.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (11) (This is too expensive!)

## 了 1+了 2: Progress up the present

S + (已經/已经) + V +了 1+ Number + Measure Word +了 2

他已經喝了兩杯酒了/他已经喝了两杯酒了

Tā yǐjīng hēle liǎng bēi jiǔle.

He has drunk two glasses of wine already.

我寫了 500 個中國字了/我已经写了 500 个中国字了

Wǒ yǐjīng xiěle 500 ge Zhōngguó zìle.

I have written 500 Chinese characters.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (12) \_\_\_\_\_ (I have already baked 3 cakes.)

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (13) \_\_\_\_\_ (She has already run 2km.)

### S + (已經/已经) + V + 了 1 + Time spent (的 de + O) + 了 2

The object can either be at the end of the sentence or at the beginning of the sentence as a topic.

他已經看了兩個鐘頭的電視了/他已经看了两个钟头的电视了

Tā yǐjīng kànle liǎng ge zhōngtóu de diànshìle.

He has watched TV for 2 hours already.

這隻狗，他養了五年了/这只狗，他养了五年了

Zhè zhī gǒu, tā yǎngle wǔniánle.

He has had this dog for 5 years.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (14) \_\_\_\_\_ (She has worked 12 hours.)

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (15) \_\_\_\_\_ (My cat has slept 8 hours)

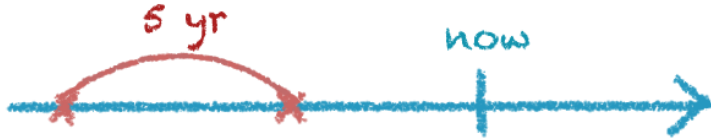
## What's the difference?

1. 我住了日本 5 年 Wǒ zhùle Rìběn 5 nián. (了 1)
2. 我住日本 5 年了 Wǒ zhù Rìběn 5 niánle. (了 2)
3. 我住了日本 5 年了 Wǒ zhùle Rìběn 5 niánle. (了 1+了 2)

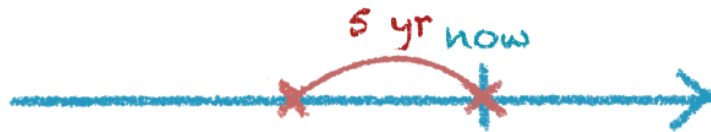


The answer is:

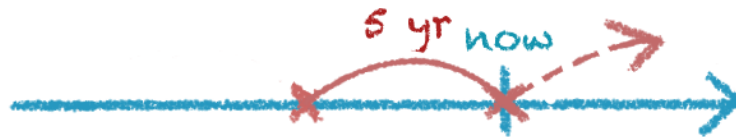
1. I lived in Japan for 5 years. (concluded, not ongoing)



2. I have lived in Japan for 5 years. (no idea about the future)



3. I have been living in Japan for 3 years. (mostly likely ongoing)



## Where verb-suffix 了 is not used

The following verbs are **impossible to be completed**, so no 了 1.

However, their statements could be changed; therefore, 了 2 is possible.

**Habitual activity:**

**If it is a habit, how could you complete it?**

Words like, usually, rarely, every Christmas, every Sunday, each day, etc.

我以前每天喝三杯咖啡，現在只喝一杯了

我以前每天喝三杯咖啡，現在只喝一杯了

Wǒ yǐqián měitiān hē sān bēi kāfēi, xiànzài zhǐ hē yībēi.

I used to drink 3 cups of coffee every day, but now I drink 1 only.

**X** 我以前每天喝了三杯咖啡，現在只喝一杯了 (you cannot add 了 1 here)

我去年每個星期六學中文，今年不學了

我去年每个星期六学中文，今年不学了

Wǒ qùnián měi ge xīngqīliù xué Zhōngwén, jīnnián bù xuéle.

I studied Chinese every Saturday last year, but not this year.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (16)

(I used to finish one cake every birthday, but I don't eat anymore.)

### Dispositional verb:

#### You cannot complete the feelings

Words like, feel, think, belief, love, like, hate, guess, etc.

我早上覺得很累，現在不累了

我早上觉得很累，现在不累了

Wǒ zǎoshang juéde hěn lèi, xiànzài bú lèile.

I was tired this morning, but I am ok now.

**X** 我早上覺得了很累，現在不累了。(you cannot add 了 1 here)

他以前相信神，現在不信了

他以前相信神，现在不信了

Tā yǐqián xiāngxìn shén, xiànzài búxìnle.

He used to believe in God, but now he doesn't.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (17)

(I loved you, but I don't love you anymore.)

### Special verb:

在 zài、姓 xìng、是 shì、有 yǒu

我在日本了

Wǒ zài rìběnle

I am in Japan now. (I wasn't in Japan before)

✘ 我在~~了~~日本 (you cannot add 了 here. If you want to express this happen in the past, you have to say 我以前在日本)

我是老師了

我是老师了

Wǒ shì lǎoshīle

I am a teacher now. (I wasn't a teacher before)

✘ 我是~~了~~老師/我是~~了~~老师 (you cannot add 了 here. If you want to express this happen in the past, you have to say 我以前是老師/我以前是老师)

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (18)

(I married Mr. Zhang, so now my last name is Zhang.)

## What's the difference?

1. 我有狗 Wǒ yǒu gǒu
2. 我有了狗 wǒ yǒule gǒu
3. 我以前有狗 wǒ yǐqián yǒu gǒu
4. 我有狗了 wǒ yǒu gǒule

**The answer is**

1. I have a dog. (Fact, present)
2. Wrong sentence!
3. I had a dog. (By adding time word to show in the past)
4. I have a dog now. (I don't have a dog before.)

## Direct speech and indirect speech:

Words like : 說/说 shuō、問/问 wèn、回答 huídá

Unlike English using “said”, “asked”, and “answered”. In Chinese Mandarin, we don’t need to emphasize its statement of completion, since it’s an obvious situation that the sentence must be completed; otherwise, you can’t quote it.

我問他：「你吃飯沒有？」他說：「吃了。」

我问他：“你吃饭没有？”他说：“吃了。”

Wǒ wèn tā: Nǐ chīfàn méiyǒu? Tā shuō: Chīle.

I asked him, “Have you eaten?” He said, “Yes!”

我問他吃飯沒有，他說吃了

我问他吃饭没有，他说吃了

Wǒ wèn tā chīfàn méiyǒu, tā shuō chīle.

I asked him that has he had eaten. He said yes.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (19)

(I asked him, “have you asked your friend?”)

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (20)

(He answered, “I haven’t asked yet.”)

## Verbal expression in series

What happens if a whole string of actions happened in the past? You have two choices. The first one is putting the time word to show it was in the past. Another way is adding one 了 at the last verb.

昨天我去台北看我的朋友

**Zuótiān** wǒ qù táiběi kàn wǒ de péngyǒu.

I went to Taipei to see my friend yesterday.

我去台北看了我的朋友。

Wǒ qù táiběi kànle wǒ de péngyǒu.

Wǒ qù táiběi kànle wǒ de péngyǒu.

I went to Taipei to see my friend.

 Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (21) \_\_\_\_\_

(We went to China and had a meeting there last week.)

## Direction verb

來(lái), 去(qù), 到(dào), 回(huí) and 離開(líkāi)...etc

These kinds of verbs are very tricky.

1. When someone arrived somewhere, you need to use the sentence particle 了 (It's a new situation) The reason we don't use verb-suffix 了 is we have a different definition of the action completed. We consider that if you are still in that place where you just arrived, then you are not counting as an action completed. It's like when you install new software on your computer. Even though the install process has run to 100%, if you didn't click the finished bottom and leave the install window, then you are not counting as completed the install process.
2. However, if you are emphasizing that after you arrived at A place and then you do an action there, you need to put 了 after direction verbs.

我回家了 Wǒ huí jiāle.

(I am home now) I am home

我到學校了/我到学校了

wǒ dào xuéxiào.

(I arrived at school) I'm at school.

我到了學校，就開始上課了

我到了学校，就开始上课了

wǒ dào le xuéxiào, jiù kāishǐ shàngkè le.

(I arrived at school, and then start to have lessons) I'm at school.

我來了公司後發現大家都不在

我来了公司后发现大家都不在

wǒ lái le gōngsī hòu fāxiàn dàjiā dōu bùzài.

(After I arrived company, I realize there was no one there.) I'm at the company.

**X** 我去了學校 Wǒ qù le xuéxiào

If you use verb-suffix 了, we may consider that you haven't finished your sentence yet.



Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (22)

(I am here! In the cafe, where are you?)



Your turn: \_\_\_\_\_ (23)

(I was there, but I can't find you. So I left)

## Answers

1. 我洗了澡  
Wǒ xǐle zǎo.
2. 我看了三本書/我看了三本书  
Wǒ kànle sān běn shū.
3. 我今天早上看了三小時的書/我今天早上看了三小时的书  
Wǒ jīntiān zǎoshàng kànle sān xiǎoshí de shū.
4. 我會說中文了/我会说中文了  
Wǒ huì shuō zhōngwénle.
5. 我懂了  
Wǒ dǒngle.
6. 我快/快要/要/就要 洗澡了  
Wǒ kuài/kuàiyào/yào/jiù yào xǐzǎole.
7. 快/快要/要/就要 下雨了  
Kuài/kuàiyào/yào/jiù yào xià yǔle.
8. 我爸爸已經不吃肉了/我爸爸已经不吃肉了  
Wǒ bàba yǐjīng bù chī ròule.
9. 我已經沒有時間了/我已经没有时间了  
Wǒ yǐjīng méiyǒu shíjiānle.
10. 別用手機了!/别用手机了!  
Bié yòng shǒujīle!
11. 這個太貴了!/这个太贵了!  
Zhège tài guile!
12. 我已經烤了三個蛋糕了/我已经烤了三个蛋糕了  
Wǒ yǐjīng kǎole sān ge dàngāole
13. 她已經跑了 2 公里了/她已经跑了 2 公里了  
Tā yǐjīng pǎole 2 gōnglǐle.

14. 她已經做了 12 小時的工作了  
她已经做了 12 小时的工作了  
Tā yǐjīng zuòle 12 xiǎoshí de gōngzuòle.
15. 我的貓已經睡了八小時(的覺)了  
我的猫已经睡了八小时(的觉)了  
Wǒ de māo yǐjīng shuìle bā xiǎoshí (de jiào) le
16. 我以前每年生日都會吃一個蛋糕，現在不吃了  
我以前每年生日都会吃一个蛋糕，现在不吃了  
Wǒ yǐqián měinián shēng rì dōu huì chī yí ge dàn gāo, xiànzài bù chī le.
17. 我以前愛你，可是現在不愛了  
我以前爱你，可是现在不爱了  
Wǒ yǐqián ài nǐ, kěshì xiànzài bù ài le.
18. 我跟張先生結婚了，所以現在我姓張了。  
我跟张先生结婚了，所以现在我姓张了。  
Wǒ gēn zhāng xiānshēng jiéhūn le, suǒyǐ xiànzài wǒ xìng zhāng le.
19. 我問他：「你問你朋友了嗎？」  
我问他：「你问你朋友了吗？」  
Wǒ wèn tā: 'Nǐ wèn nǐ péngyǒu le ma?'
20. 他回答：「還沒問。」/他回答：「还没问。」  
Tā huídá: 'Hái méi wèn.'
21. 我們上週去中國開會/我们上周去中国开会  
Wǒmen shàng zhōu qù zhōngguó kāihuì.
22. 我到咖啡店了，你在哪？  
Wǒ dào kāfēi diàn le, nǐ zài nǎ?
23. 我到了咖啡店沒看到你，所以我離開了。  
我到了咖啡店没看到你，所以我离开了。  
Wǒ dào le kāfēi diàn méi kàn dào nǐ, suǒyǐ wǒ lí kāi le.