

Learn to Use 3 Different Chinese Particles (的 De、得 De、地 De)

Many students are confused about these three structural particles: 的(de), 得(de) and 地(de). In today's lesson I am going to explain the different uses of them.

The three structural particles share the same pronunciation “de”, and they have no specific meanings and cannot be used alone, but you can see the characters are totally different, and each one has its own uses.

的(de) is normally used for modifying nouns.

得(de) and 地(de) modify verbs.

1. 的(de)

In lesson 02 of our elementary Chinese course, 的(de) is used to express possession.

For example,

妈妈的衣服

Māma de yīfu

Mom's clothes

他的手机

Tā de shǒujī

His mobile phone

In lesson 28, we learned that 的(de) can also be used to connect words, phrases or clauses with a noun, which tells us more detailed information about the noun.

For example,

漂亮的衣服

Piàoliang de yīfu

Beautiful clothes

白色的手机

Báisè de shǒujī

White mobile phone

穿衬衣的男人

Chuān chèn yī de nán rén

The man who is wearing a shirt

我昨天买的蛋糕

Wǒ zuótiān mǎi de dàngāo

The cake that I bought yesterday

I think you probably already noticed that the Chinese word order of the last two examples is almost opposite to that of English. Remember that in Chinese if you want to modify or describe a noun, just put all the detailed information before the noun, and use this 的(de) to connect them.

2. 得(de)

得(de) and 地(de) can both be used for modifying verbs, but their structures and uses are different. 得(de) is placed after the verb, but 地(de) should be put before the verb.

得(de) can be used to ask or tell how well someone does something.

For example,

他汉语说得怎么样？

Tā Hànyǔ shuō de zěnmeyàng?

How well does he speak Chinese?

If he speaks Chinese very fluently, you can say:

他汉语说得很流利。

Tā Hànyǔ shuō de hěn liúlì.

Another example,

她跑得很快。

Tā pǎo de hěn kuài.

She runs very fast.

Actually we already learned this in lesson 21 of our elementary Chinese course, you can watch it for more detailed explanation.

得(de) can also be used to connect potential complements with a verb to indicate that something can happen.

For example,

他听得懂中文。

Tā tīng de dǒng Zhōngwén.

He can understand Chinese.

听得懂(tīng de dǒng) means “can understand by hearing”.

看得懂(kàn de dǒng) means “can understand by seeing or reading”.

你吃得完这些菜吗？

Nǐ chī de wán zhèxiē cài ma?

Can you finish eating these dishes?

吃得完(chī de wán) means “can finish eating”.

3. 地(de)

地(de) is placed before the verb, basically we often use it to describe the way in which the action is being carried out or how something is done.

For example,

我睁开了眼睛

Wǒ zhēngkāile yǎnjīng.

I opened my eyes.

If I want to tell you how I opened my eyes, like I slowly opened my eyes, In Chinese you can say:

我慢慢地睁开了眼睛

Wǒ mànman de zhēngkāile yǎnjīng.

慢慢地(mànman de) means “slowly”.

Another example,

他们在吃饭。

Tāmen zài chīfàn.

They are eating.

他们在安静地吃饭。

Tāmen zài ānjìng de chīfàn.

They are eating quietly.

安静地(ānjìng de) means “quietly”, here we use it to describe the way they are eating or how they are eating.

地(de) can also be used to indicate an attitude or a mood of the subject.

For example,

老师在回答问题。

Lǎoshī zài huídá wèntí.

The teacher is answering questions.

There is no 地(de) phrase in this sentence, so we don't know any information about the teacher's attitude or mood.

But if we say:

老师在耐心地回答问题。

Lǎoshī zài nànxīn de huídá wèntí.

The teacher is patiently answering questions.

耐心地(nànxīn de) tells us that the teacher is patient while he/she is answering questions.

One more example,

他离开了

Tā líkāi le.

He left.

他生气地离开了。

Tā shēngqì de líkāi le.

He left angrily.

生气地(shēngqì de) means “angrily”, we know that he was angry when he left.

Here is a question for you. If you want to say:

He plays basketball very well.

他打篮球打____很好。

Tā dǎ lánqiú dǎ ____ hěn hǎo.

Which “de” should be filled in the blank?