

Mistake #6 Confusion about “verb + default object” verbs

In Chinese, there’s such a concept called “verb-plus-default-object-verb” . For example, the English word “to read” can be either “看 (kan4)” or “看书 (kan4 shu1)” depending how you use it. “看书(kan4 shu1)” is a “verb-plus-default-object-verb” .

In English, you can say “I like to read magazines” , “I like to read books” , I like to read novels “ . “To read” for these three sentences is “ 看(kan4)” . However, if you just want to say “I like to read” without referring to anything specific, you’ ll have to assign a default object to the verb “to read” , which is “book-书 (shu1)” . So to simply put, if you don’ t specify, we’ re going to specify for you by assigning an obligatory object to your verb. So “to read” in the sentence “I like to read” is “看书 (kan4 shu1)” . We call verbs such as “看书 (kàn shū)” “verb-plus-default-object-verbs” .

So in Chinese, when you say “I like to read” , you are literally saying “I like to read books” . If you have something specific to refer to, for example, if you want to say “I like to read newspaper” , you should go right ahead and use that specific thing- “newspapers” to **replace** the default object- “book – 书 (shū)” . (*Remember, in this case, you need to get rid of the default object “书(shu1)” .*)

Verbs English	Verbs Chinese	Examples English	Examples Pinyin	Examples Chinese
To read	kàn shū 看书 看書 (v + d.o.)	I like to <u>read</u> .	wǒ xǐ huān <u>kàn shū</u> 。	我喜歡 <u>看書</u> 。 我喜歡看書。
	kàn 看	I like to <u>read</u> books.	wǒ xǐ huān <u>kàn shū</u> 。	我喜歡 <u>看書</u> 。 我喜歡看書。
		I like to <u>read</u> newspapers.	wǒ xǐ huān <u>kàn bào zhǐ</u> 。	我喜歡 <u>看報紙</u> 。 我喜歡看報紙。
		I like to <u>read</u> novels.	wǒ xǐ huān <u>kàn xiǎo shuō</u> 。	我喜歡 <u>看小說</u> 。 我喜歡看小說。

Common Chinese Mistakes Made by English Speakers

The following table covers some common “verb-plus-default-object-verbs” .

Verbs English	Verbs Chinese	Examples English	Examples Pinyin	Examples Chinese
To sing	chàng gē 唱歌 (sing + song)	I like to <u>sing</u> .	wǒ xǐ huān <u>chàng gē</u> .	我喜歡 <u>唱歌</u> 。 我喜歡 <u>唱歌</u> 。
	chàng 唱	I like to <u>sing</u> Chinese songs.	wǒ xǐ huān <u>chàng zhōng wén gē</u> .	我喜歡 <u>唱</u> 中文歌。 我喜歡 <u>唱</u> 中文歌。
To eat	chī fàn 吃飯 吃飯 (eat + meal)	I want to <u>eat</u> .	wǒ xǐ huān <u>chī fàn</u> .	我想 <u>吃飯</u> 。 我想 <u>吃飯</u> 。
	chī 吃	What do you want to <u>eat</u> ?	nǐ xiǎng <u>chī</u> shén me ?	你想 <u>吃</u> 什麼？ 你想 <u>吃</u> 什麼？
To drive	kāi chē 開車 開車 (drive + car)	I <u>drive</u> to work everyday.	wǒ měi tiān <u>kāi chē</u> shàng bān .	我每天 <u>開車</u> 上班。 我每天 <u>開車</u> 上班。
	kāi 开(開)	What car do you drive? (lit. You <u>drive</u> what car?)	nǐ <u>kāi</u> shén me chē ?	你开什麼車？ 你開什麼車？
To run	pǎo bù 跑步 (run + step)	I like to <u>run</u> (jog).	wǒ xǐ huān <u>pǎo bù</u> .	我喜歡 <u>跑步</u> 。 我喜歡 <u>跑步</u> 。
	pǎo 跑	I like to <u>run</u> Marathon.	wǒ xǐ huān <u>pǎo mǎ lā sōng</u> .	我喜歡 <u>跑</u> 馬拉松。 我喜歡 <u>跑</u> 馬拉松。
To treat	qǐng kè 請客 請客 (treat + guest)	My treat today. (lit. Today I <u>treat</u> .)	jīn tiān wǒ <u>qǐng kè</u> .	今天我 <u>請客</u> 。 今天我 <u>請客</u> 。
	qǐng 請(請)	I like to <u>treat</u> friends.	wǒ xǐ huān <u>qǐng péng yǒu</u> .	我喜歡 <u>請</u> 朋友。 我喜歡 <u>請</u> 朋友。
To dance	tiào wǔ 跳舞 (dance + dance)	Can I invite you to <u>dance</u> ? (lit. I can invite you to <u>dance</u> ma?)	wǒ kě yǐ qǐng nǐ <u>tiào wǔ</u> ma ?	我可以 <u>請</u> 你跳舞嗎？ 我可以 <u>請</u> 你跳舞嗎？
	tiào 跳	Can you <u>dance</u> Cha Cha?	nǐ huì <u>tiào</u> Cha Cha ma ?	你會 <u>跳</u> Cha Cha嗎？ 你會 <u>跳</u> Cha Cha嗎？

Common Chinese Mistakes Made by English Speakers

To speak To talk	shuō huà 说话 說話 (speak remarks)	She likes to <u>talk</u> (<u>speak</u>).	tā xǐ huān <u>shuō huà</u> 。	她喜欢说话。 她喜歡說話。
	shuō 说(說)	I can <u>speak</u> Chinese.	wǒ huì <u>shuō</u> zhōng wén 。	我会说中文。 我會說中文。
To cook	zuò fàn 做饭 做飯 (cook rice)	Do you <u>cook</u> often? (You often cook ma?)	nǐ cháng cháng <u>zuò fàn</u> ma ?	你常常做饭吗？ 你常常做飯嗎？
	zuò 做	Can you <u>cook</u> Italian food?	nǐ huì <u>zuò</u> yì dà lì cài ma ?	你会做意大利菜吗？ 你會做意大利菜嗎？