Why bother Refining Questioning in Chinese Lessons?: From Retrieval to Deeper Thinking



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Why do teachers ask questions in class?

You might have said:

- To test understanding of a new concept.
- To deepen and develop understanding.
- To create curiosity.
- To ensure that students take a share in the cognitive work of the classroom.
- To help you form and sustain your classroom culture.



Guess the number:



The average teacher asks around 350 questions per day.

Guess the number：



1. About 20 % of questions asked were higher cognitive,
2. About 60 % lower cognitive.

Guess the number:



The recommend wait times for closed questions is 3-5 sec ,

The actual average wait times is 1 sec .

Doing an Audit- Don’t fret!





Record and Tally

TIME	Teacher Questions	Question Form

Analysis

Question Form Abbreviation	Question form explanation	Number of instances
QW	Start with Question word	
NQW	Did not start with a question word	
Y/N	Yes/No Question	
WK	Who knows….?	
FIB	Fill in the blank	
TT	Think time	
NTT	No think time	
SNA	Student name after question	
SNB	Student name before question	
TPS	Think-Pair-Share	

Three Frameworks of developing different types of thinking			
Bloom Revised	**Assessing or Advancing**	**ThinkTrix**	**Number of instances**
Remember/Recall	assessing	Recall	
Understand		Cause/Effect	
Apply		Similarity/Difference	
Analyze	advancing	Idea to Example	
Evaluate		Example to Idea	

Reflect

The teacher's Reflection

"Telling people what we think of their performance doesn't help them thrive and excel and telling people how we think they should improve actually hinders learning" (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019, p. 2).

- To what extent the record meet your expectation (1- not really. 5 it is totally what I expected)?
- How is it different from what you expected, in more details?
- Which aspect do you wish to develop more?
- What are your success criteria for developing this aspect of your questioning?
- What obstacles might you meet?
- What support do you need? From whom?
- How and when will you get that support?
- On a scale of 1-10, how certain are you that you will carry out the actions agreed?

A snapshot of mine (50min lesson), 2 years ago

Bloom Revised	Number of instances
Remember/Recall	6
Understand	7
Apply	3
Analyze	2
Evaluate	
Create	6

10:12	Qu zhongguo lvyou yinggai dai shenme? Xxx?	SNA
10:12	How do you say friends who speak Chinese? Everybody think about it.	QW, TT,
10:14	You can't start with friend, xx has tried. So what can you start with?	QW, SNB, TT
10:17	You have learnt xiang as....?	FIB
10:18	How are you gonna say I miss home?	QW,

10:36	Nope. Anybody can offer a different answer?	WK, TT
10:36	What's the character after yinian?	QW,
10:38	Can you look at Anna's line and tell me the specifics please, xxx?	QW, SNA, TT

Questioning for Retrieval - Interleaving



Example of questioning

Which version do you prefer, and why?

星期五弟弟去图书馆。（　　）

A. On Thursday younger sister goes to the library.

B. On Wednesday younger brother goes to the sports ground.

C. On Monday mum goes to the library.

D. On Friday younger brother goes to the library.

星期五弟弟去图书馆。（　　）

A. On Friday younger brother goes to the library.

B. On Friday younger brother goes to the sports ground.

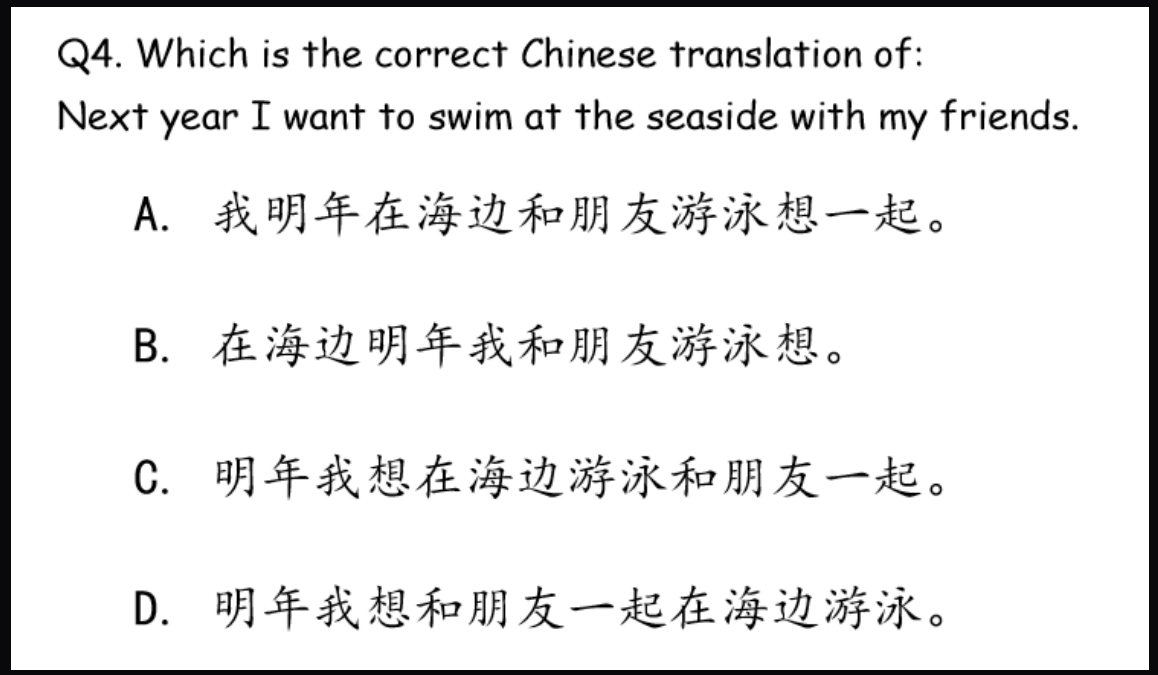
C. On Thursday younger brother goes to the library.

D. On Thursday younger brother goes to the sports ground.

The Variation is intentional

1. What is the ‘end goal’ this question is hoping to achieve?
2. Are students likely to mix this concept up?
3. How well is this question addressing the issue? (on a 0-5 scale?)

Example 2


Q4. Which is the correct Chinese translation of:
Next year I want to swim at the seaside with my friends.

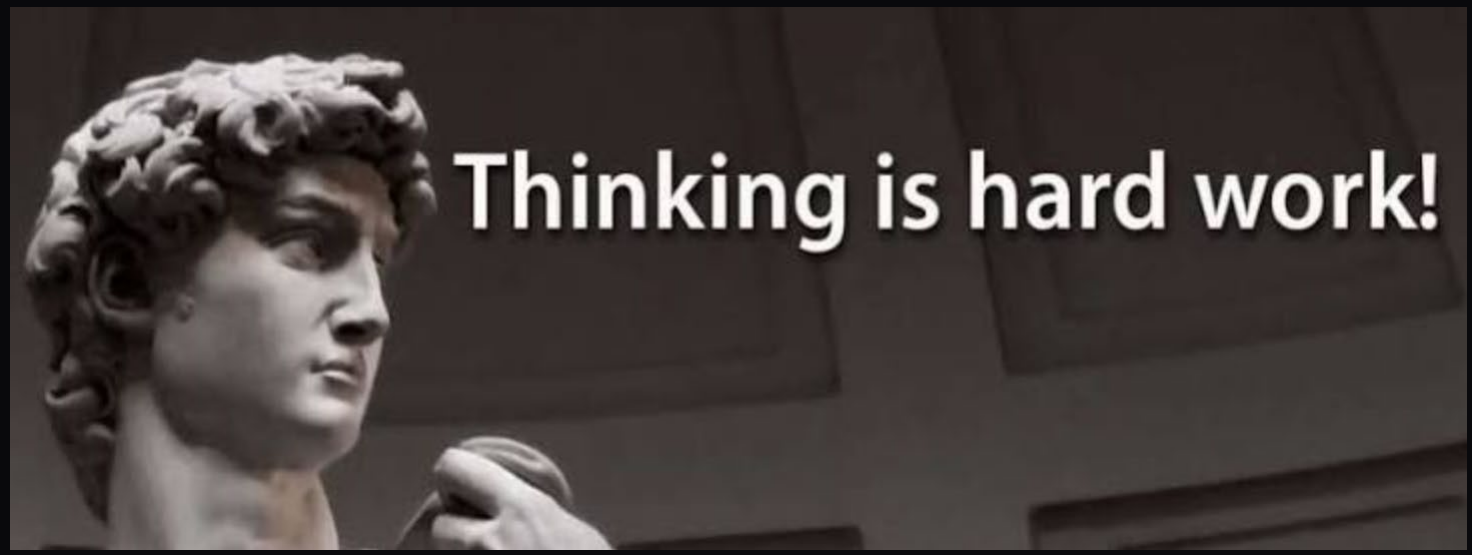
A. 我明年在海边和朋友游泳想一起。

B. 在海边明年我和朋友游泳想。

C. 明年我想在海边游泳和朋友一起。

D. 明年我想和朋友一起在海边游泳。

Purpose is the key


Thinking is hard work!

Teaching grammar through questioning- more high-level thinking

Grammar teaching example

Edexcel GCSE 9-1 textbook, Unit 6 Holidays



GRAMMAR: 换 (HUÀN) 'CHANGE'

To change transport: 我每天上班要换三次车，很不方便。
I have to change buses three times to travel to work every day. It's very inconvenient.

To change money: 我想用英镑 (yīng bàng) 换点人民币 (rén mín bì)。
I would like to change some sterling into Chinese currency.

To change clothes: 请等一下，我需要换件衣服。
Please wait a moment, I need to change my clothes.

Grammar 换(huàn) = to change, to exchange

Which one is which, label them with **M** (money), **T** (transport) or **C** (clothes)

(　　) 1 妈妈每天上班要换三次(cì)地铁，很不方便(fāngbiàn)!

(　　) 2 下个月我要去中国旅游(lǚyóu)，我想用英镑(yīngbàng)换人民币(rénmínbì)。

(　　) 3 下午有体育(tǐyù)课，我要换运动服(fú)。

Then answer the questions:

1. In 1 and 3, how does the notion 'want/ need to/ it requires' be expressed in Chinese?

2. In 1,how does the notion 'times' (as in once, twice, 3 times) be expressed in Chinese?

3. Based on the above, translate 'twice' in to Chinese characters. [Which two do you need?]

4. Using 1 as a formula for sentence order, translate 'I every week plays tennis 3 times' in characters. [Think about the verb phrase ''play tennis' is together, or separated?]

AQA GCSE textbook 2, Unit 14 Su Zhou

14.10 Grammar practice: 越

Put a 越来越 phrase in each gap. Then write the English translation for each sentence.

Example:

他的头发—— ⇨ 他的头发越来越长。 *His hair is getting longer and longer.*

1. 老师说得——
2. 天气——
3. 妈妈做的菜——
4. 我做——的运动
5. 她唱的歌——

About the Language: 越……越……

越 is used in sentence structures which show matching trends.

天气越好，人越多。	The better the weather, the more people there are are.
买电脑越贵越好。	When buying computers, the more expensive, the better

The English equivalent to this structure is *the more…, the more…*

Another use of 越 is in 越来越, similar to English *more and more* or *…er and …er.*

他跑得越来越快。	He ran faster and faster.
你的中文越来越好。	Your Chinese is getting better and better.
越来越多的人上网。	More and more people use the internet.

Through Questioning

Grammar yuè lái yuè 越来越

1. 奶奶快七十岁了，她的头发越来越白了。

2. 这几年手机的价格越来越贵了。

3. 冬天来了，天气越来越冷，上个星期还下雪了。

4. 学校的菜越来越难吃了，我很难过。

5. 陈老师学了两年左右的滑雪，滑得越来越好。这个冬天她第一次上了黑道。

Q1 In sentences 1-5, What is the common phrase that shows something is changing?

Q2 Which two sentences describe a negative change? Write the sentence numbers, and translate into English what are the negative changes?

Q3 According to sentence 3, what two things tell us that winter has arrived? (Give both details.)

Q4 According to sentence 4, what is the speaker's reaction to the change?

Q5 According to sentence 5, how long has Ms Chen been learning to ski, and what new achievement has she reached this winter?

Inclusive questioning

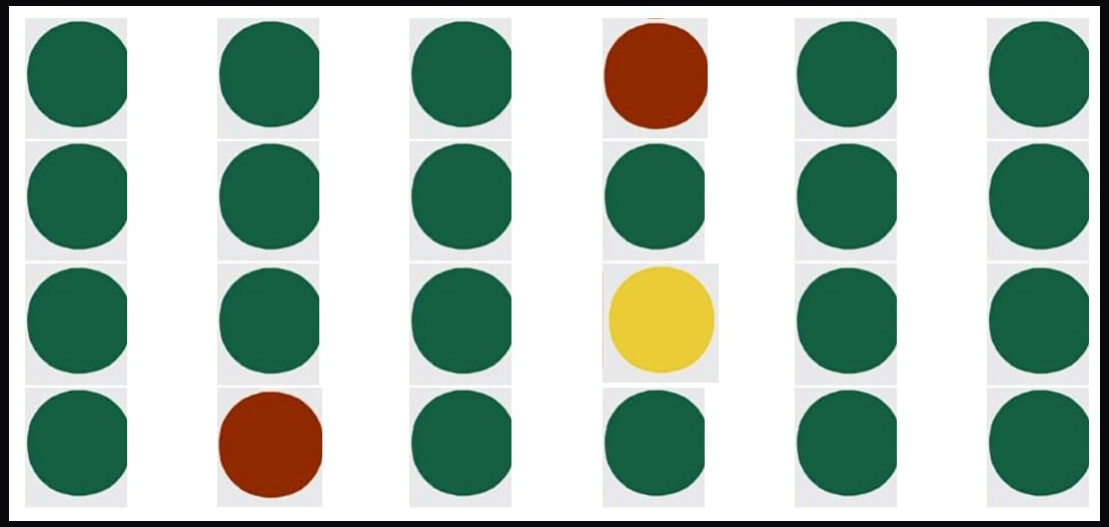


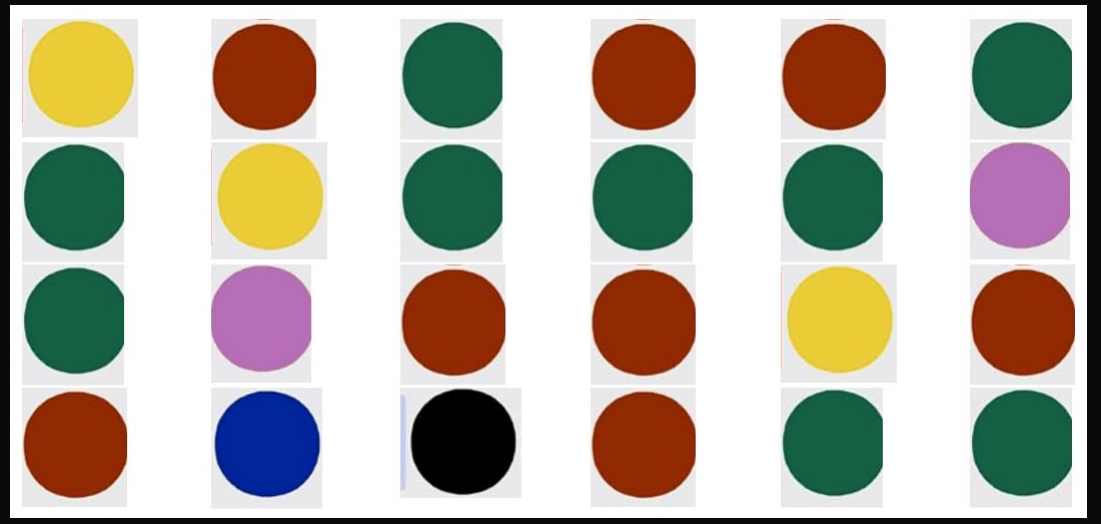
Guess the number:



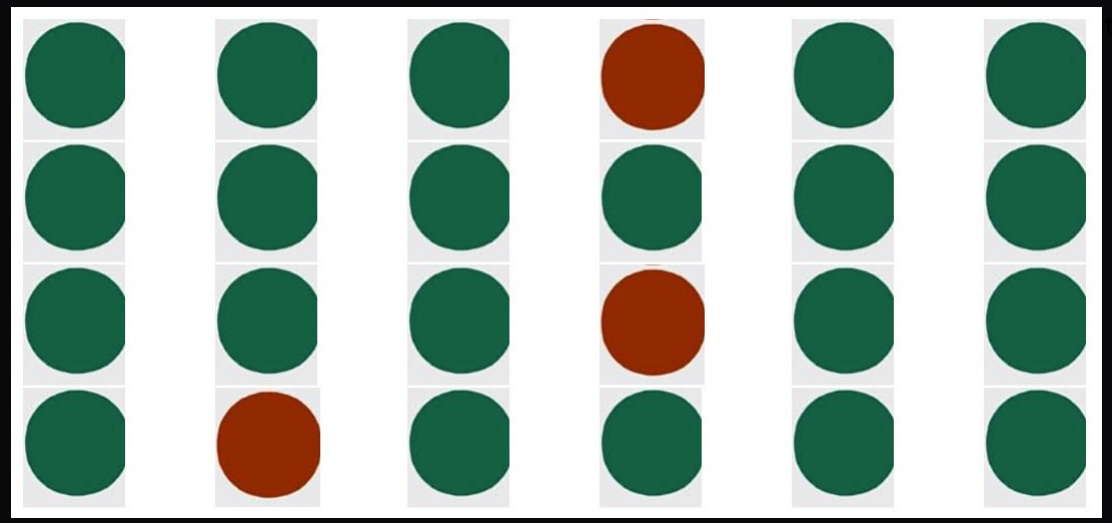
A teacher notices 10-20 % of ‘what’s happening’ in a lesson.

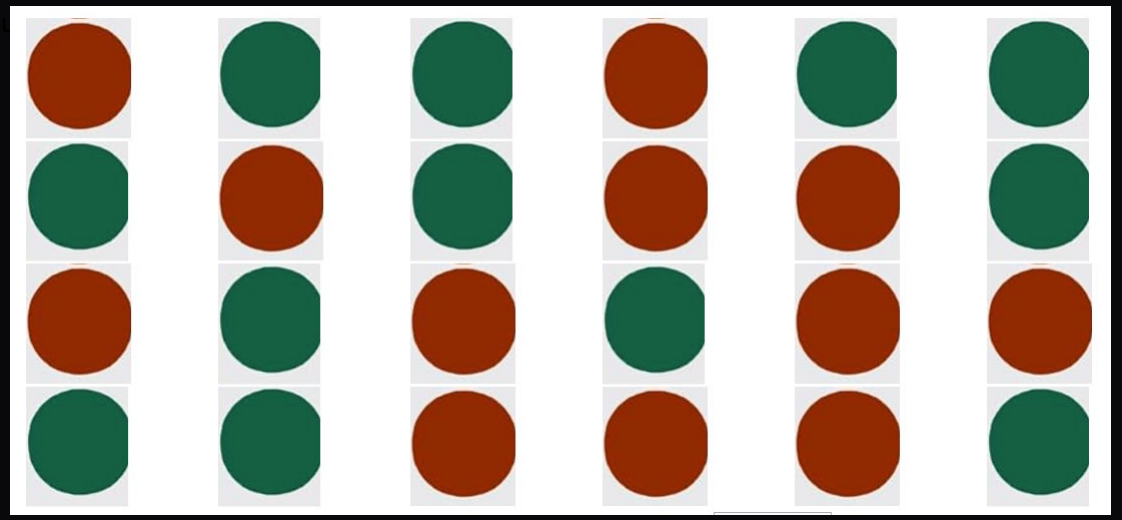
When teacher asks a question, who are cognitively engaged?





Several students answer the question successfully. What about the rest of the class?





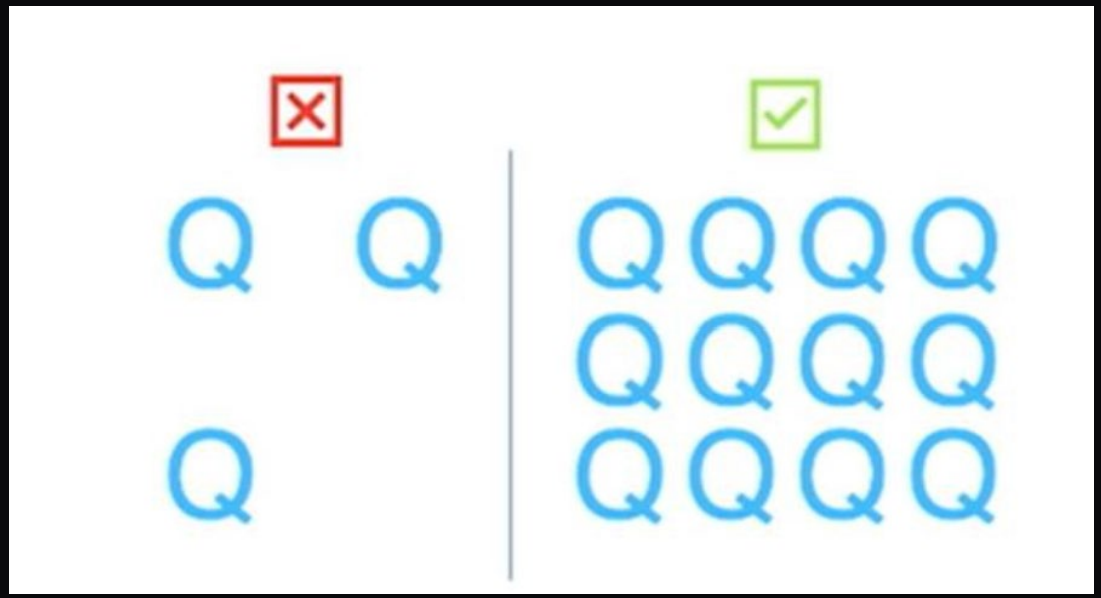
Drill Down


Grammar Revision
chén
zài xué xiào
A 陈老师明天要游泳在学校。
in school
B 陈老师明天要在学校游泳。
C 明天陈老师要游泳在学校。
D 明天陈老师要在学校游泳。
E 陈老师要游泳在学校明天。
F 陈老师要在学校游泳明天。
Judge which one/ones are grammatically correct.
What aspect of the sentence are we looking at?


Grammar Revision
chén
zài xué xiào
A 陈老师明天要游泳在学校。
in school
B 陈老师明天要在学校游泳。
C 明天陈老师要游泳在学校。
D 明天陈老师要在学校游泳。
E 陈老师要游泳在学校明天。
F 陈老师要在学校游泳明天。

Trusted technique:

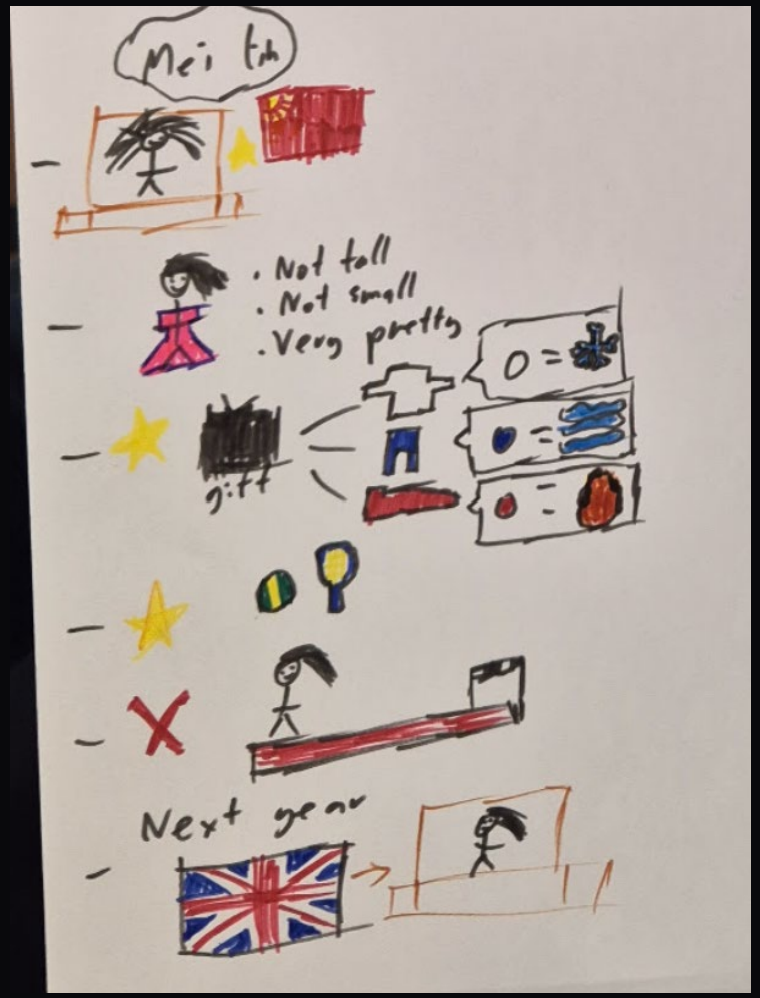
More Questions, More often



Source:
Bruce Robertson

Every **minute** of teacher talk,
aim to ask at least **ONE** question.

A spin on mini white board: Comprehension drawing



4 Read the text and answer the questions in English.

她叫张美丽，她是电影明星。她不高不矮，很漂亮。她的电影很好看，人们都很喜欢她。张美丽喜欢穿红色的大衣、蓝色的裙子和红色的鞋。她说，白色像雪，蓝色像天，红色像火。她晚上十二点睡觉，上午十点起床。

1 What does Zhang Meili do?

2 What does she look like?

3 Why do people like her?

4 What clothes does she like to wear and why?

5 What time does she go to bed and get up?

明星 míng xīng star
像 xiàng looks like
火 huǒ fire



Preparation beforehand

Blooket link:
2.1 + 2.2
https://dashboard.blooket.com/set/68f000c747c4d0eed9df334a
2.3 + 2.4
https://dashboard.blooket.com/set/695f7003ab4074bb62aa5642
Whole Topic:
https://dashboard.blooket.com/set/695f6efa6268cef92122708e

Name 中文 Unit 2 All About Me 三年级

Unit 2 All About Me Vocab

2.1 I am tall

很 hěn , Very

非常 fēi cháng , Extremely; very

不太 bú tài , Not very

高 gāo , Tall

矮 ǎi , Short (in height)

胖 pàng , Fat

瘦 shòu , Thin; slim

帅 shuài , Handsome

忙 máng , Busy

好看 hǎo kàn , Good-looking

漂亮 piào liang , Pretty

美丽 měi lì , Beautiful

张 zhāng , Measure word (for flat objects like photos, paper, etc.)

照片 zhào piàn , Photo; picture

笨 bèn , Stupid; clumsy

聪明 cōng ming , Clever; intelligent; smart

2.2 My bedroom

住在 zhù zài , To live in; to reside at

卧室 wò shì , Bedroom

卫生间 wèi shēng jiān , Bathroom

床 chuáng , Bed

桌子 zhuō zi , Table

椅子 yǐ zi , Chair

柜子 guì zi , Cupboard

书架 shū jià , Bookshelf

电脑 diàn nǎo , Computer

电视 diàn shì , Television

灯 dēng , Lamp

门 mén , Door

笔 bǐ , Pen

1

Name 中文 Unit 2 All About Me 三年级

张 zhāng , Measure word for flat objects like table and bed

把 bǎ , Measure word for chairs

玩具 wán jù , Toy

很多 hěn duō , Many; a lot

整齐 zhěng qí , Tidy

白色的 bái sè de , White

红色的 hóng sè de , Red

绿色的 lǜ sè de , Green

蓝色的 lán sè de , Blue

黄色的 huáng sè de , Yellow

紫色的 zǐ sè de , Purple

noun + prep.

A 柜子里边

B (在) 里面柜子

jiào shì

中文教室上边

西班牙

zài

my fat cat 在 on the bed.

猫

我们的学校里边

女学生

nǚ xué shēng

female student= girls

wear blue/black culottes

I go home at pm 6:30.

When Who do What

Who When do What.

我晚上六点半回家。

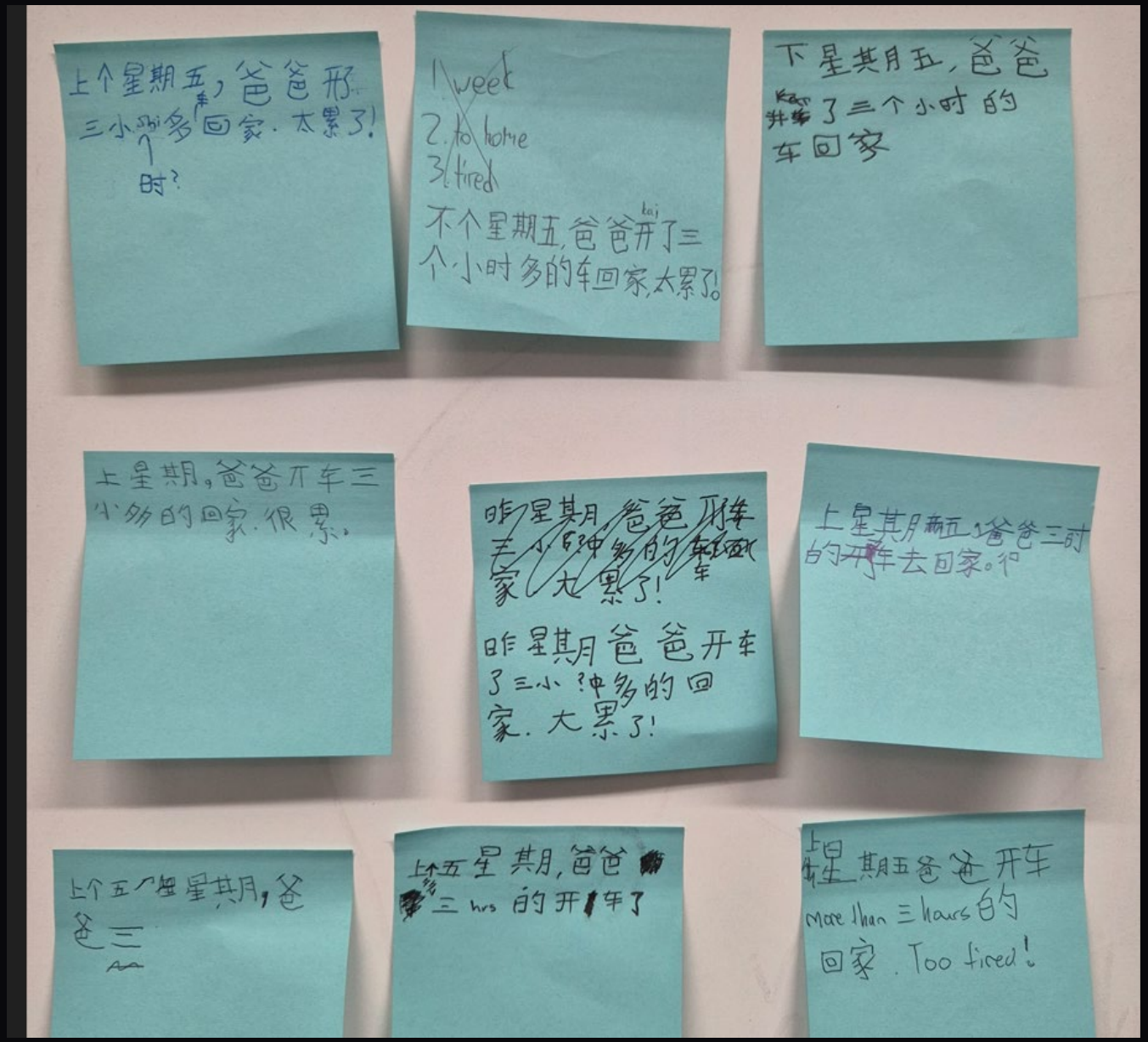
bàn

6:30

Sept 2026

二零二六年九月

Everybody Writes



Grammar Revision: Duration of time

left ~ right.

Eg: 我， 上中文课， 50 分钟左右 (zuǒyòu)， 了

about. approx. (after a number)

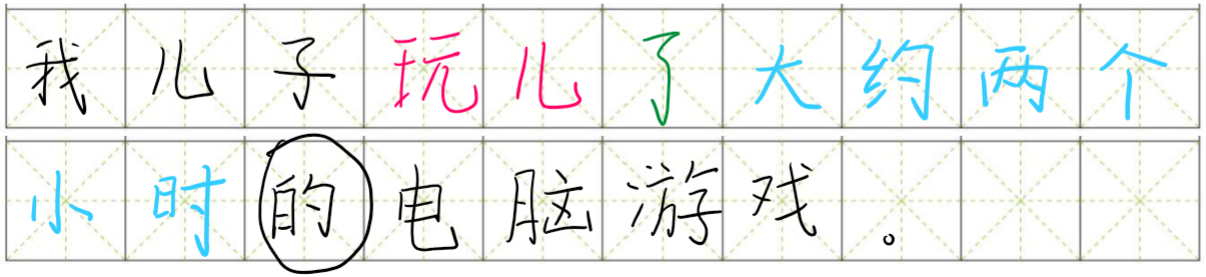
- Duration words goes between the verb and the rest of the verbal phrase,
- Need to stick a 的 after the duration word
- 了，(past tense) goes after the verb.

So the correct order is:

我 上了 50 分钟左右的中文课。

Make a sentence out of the following component to express duration of time. Then translate them into English.

1 我儿子，了，玩儿电脑游戏，大约 (dàyuē) 两个小时

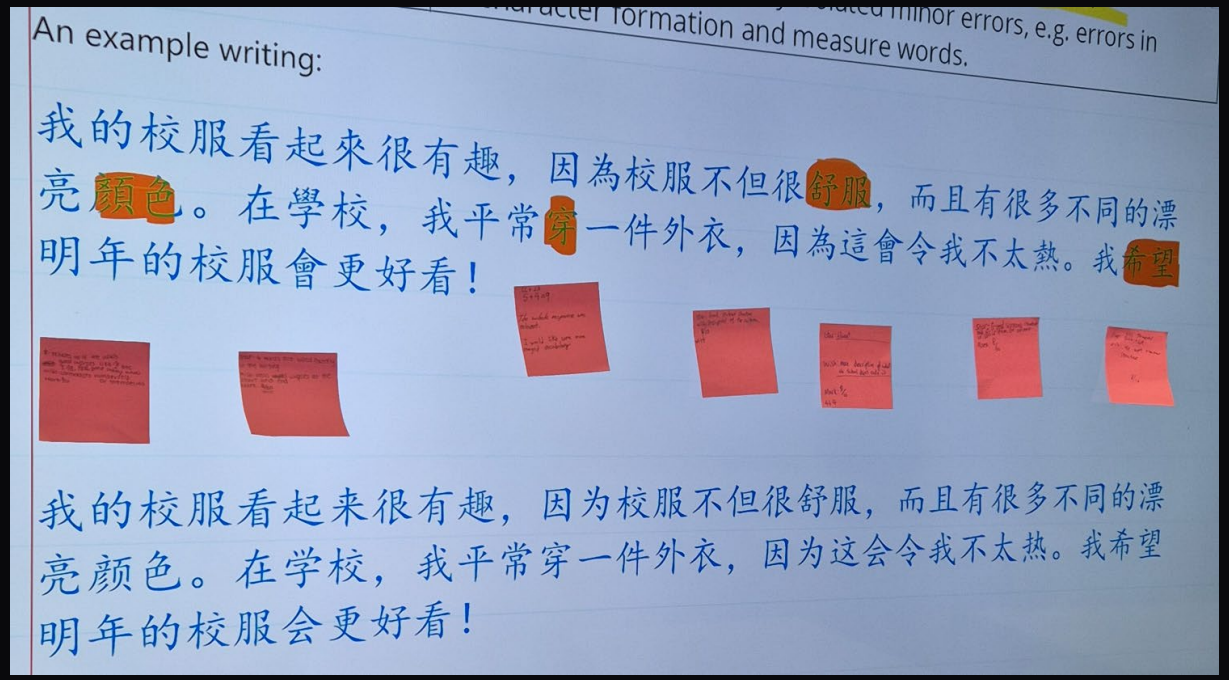


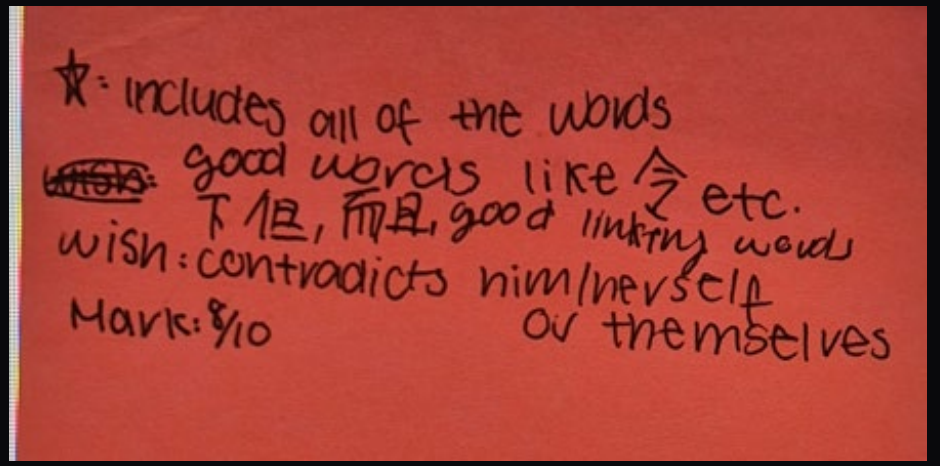
My son spent approx. 2h playing computer games.

played .... for approx. 2h.

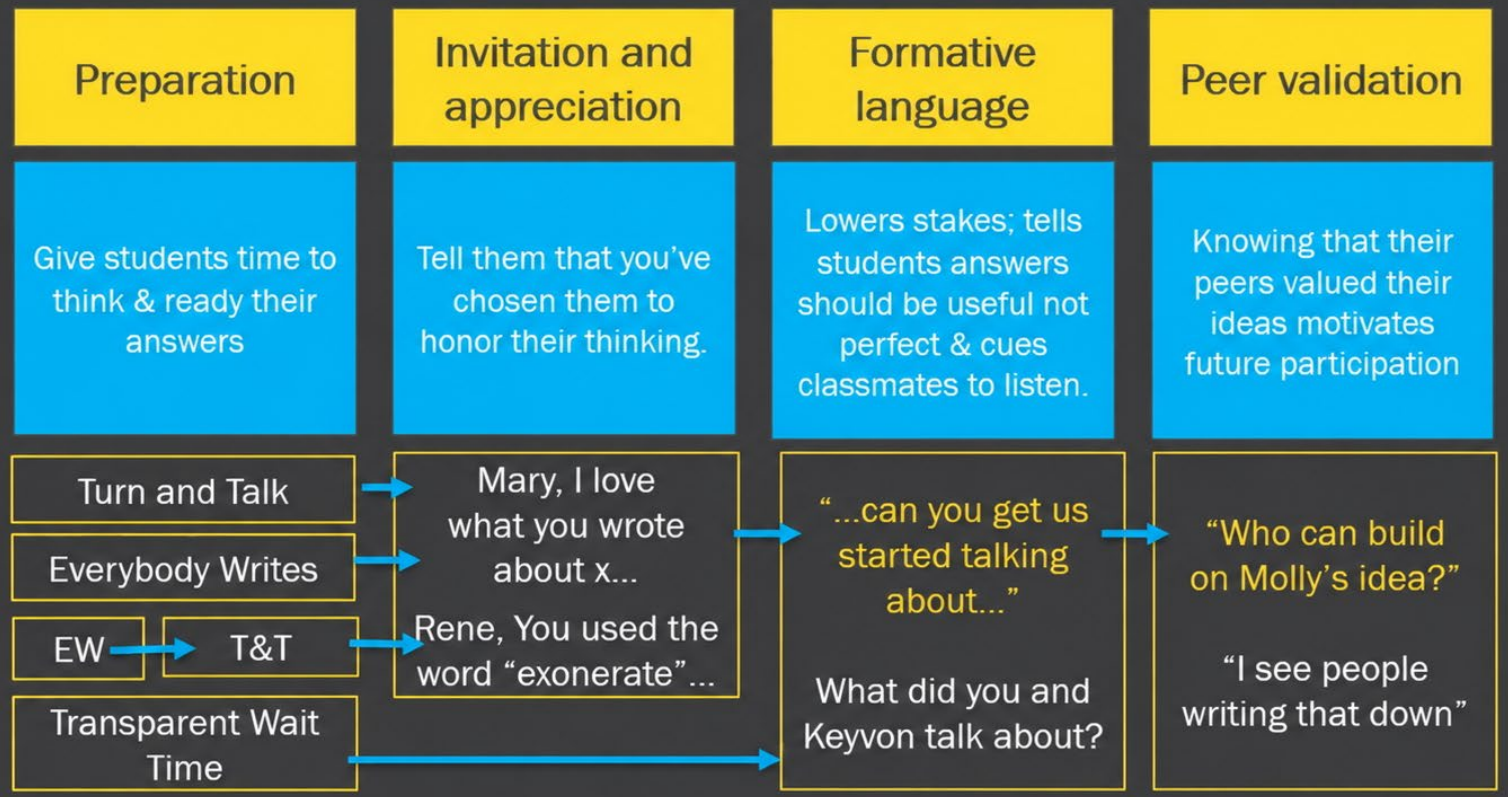
Preparation beforehand

Gallery Critique



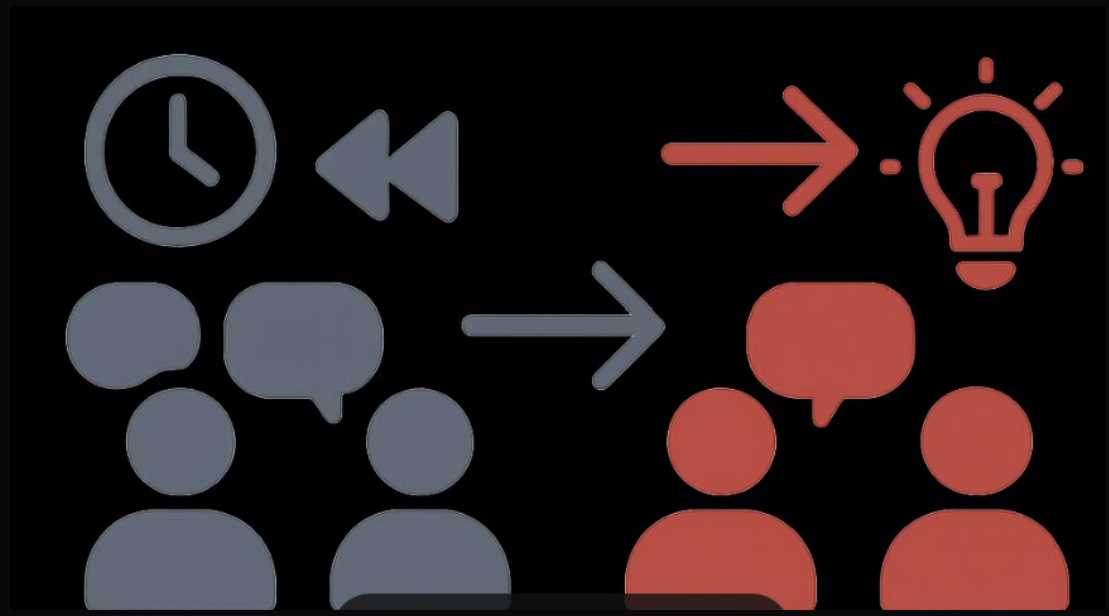


Positive Inclusive Cold Call Starter Kit



Source: Doug Lemov
Teach Like a Champion

Using questions in feedback- [or feedforward]



How do you mark pupils' work? After marking, what do you do?

(c) 写一篇博客，说说你对中学生怎么过假期的看法。你必须包括以下几点：

Write a blog about how secondary school students spend their holidays. You **MUST** include the following points:

- 上一个假期你做了什么 ✓
  What you did last holiday
- 你喜欢去什么地方度假 ✓
  Where you like to spend your holiday
- 你对有的中学生在假期兼职的看法 ✓
  Your opinion on some secondary school students doing part-time jobs during their holidays
- 中学生应该怎样更好地用空闲时间
  How secondary school students should make better use of their free time

Level 5	9-10	• The response shows an excellent ability to express ideas in a logical sequence and errors do not interfere with comprehension for a sympathetic native speaker. • The response is entirely coherent and, while there may be minor ambiguities or digression from the theme, the response is confident, fluent, pertinent and purposeful.

Task 1. Rank the following 7 responses. All of them are responding to 中学生应该怎样更好地用空闲时间.

Rank from the **MOST clear**, directly addressing the BP' to '**Ambiguous**, can be viewed as not addressing the BP'.

Note: not all sentences are perfect.

Most clear----------Most Ambiguous						

A. 中学生应该在空闲时间里半玩半学习。

B. 中学生应该多做运动，不要总是呆(dāi)在家里。 这样他们的身体会更健康(jiànkāng)，假期生活也会变得(biàn de)更加丰富多彩(fēng fù duō cǎi)。

C. 我觉得中学生可以在空闲时间做一些他们喜欢的运动或者(huòzhě)去一些他们喜欢的地方。

D. 中学生也要学习，所以学习还是重要的，但假期还是快乐最重要。

E. 加上，我覺得中學生可以另自己的時間十分有趣 by 去空外玩球、游泳和玩樂。

F. 我平时在我的空闲时间做很多运动和画画。

Further Reading :

Dunlosky's Strengthening the Student Toolbox in Action by Amarbeer Singh Gill : a particular chapter on interleaving

Power Up Your Questioning by Bruce Robertson

The Teacher CPD Academy book series by Inner Drives, research informed teaching advice. Good place to start finding names

3min: workshop feedback

IOE Annual Chinese Teaching Conference Feedback Form 2026 (Workshop 1-Jenny Chen)

谢谢！