以前 (yǐqián) / 以后 (yǐhòu)

before and after, past and future

1. **[event] 以前 / 以后，[something happens]**

The structure above is used to say that something happens after that event. The same structure can be used to talk about past or future events - it simply sequences the events in time. You can swap 以后 (after) for 以前 (before) - the structure is the same.

Examples:

去加拿大以前，他在英国教书。

Qù Jiānádà yǐqián, tā zài Yīngguó jiāoshū.

Before he went to Canada, he taught in the UK.

到办公室以前，我需要打个电话。

Dào bàngōngshì yǐqián, wǒ xūyào dǎ gè diànhuà.

Before I get to the office, I need to make a phone call.

吃饭以后，我要看书。

Chīfàn yǐhòu, wǒ yào kànshū.

After I've eaten, I'm going to read.

下班以后，我要学习中文。

Xiàbān yǐhòu, wǒ yào xuéxí zhōngwén.

After finishing work, I'm going to study Chinese.

吃了早餐以后，我要去健身房。

Chīle zǎocān yǐhòu, wǒ yào qù jiànshēnfáng.

After eating breakfast, I'm going to go to the gym.

Notice how the basic structure is the same for 以前 and 以后, and how versatile this pattern is. You can put pretty any event or action in the first part, and use that to sequence the other event in relation to it.

1. **[amount of time] 以后，[something happens]**

You can also use this pattern to talk about things happening before or after a specific amount of time. The structure is the same:

Again, you can swap 以后 (after) for 以前 (before). This pattern works the same way as the one above. Have a look at some examples:

三天以前，我在南京。

Sān tiān yǐqián, wǒ zài Nánjīng.

Three days ago, I was in Nanjing.

我们晚上八点以前就会到。

Wǒmen wǎnshàng bā diǎn yǐqián jiù huì dào.

We'll arrive before 8pm.

十分钟以后，他就走了。

Shí fēnzhōng yǐhòu, tā jiù zǒule.

He left ten minutes later.

我一个星期以后会回来。

Wǒ yīgè xīngqí yǐhòu huì huílái.

I will come back in one week.

五年以后，我会有自己的房子。

Wǔ nián yǐhòu, wǒ huì yǒu zìjǐ de fángzi.

In five years I will have my own house.

Translation:

1. Five minutes later
2. Three days later
3. Four years later
4. 400 years later, Sam Franklin is at Tower Hill School.
5. After seeing the ghost and hearing her laugh, I started running.
6. Before the Chinese class starts, she wanted to go to the bathroom.
7. Before I could see the ghost, I heard some stranger sound.