SAYMEI · EVERYDAY CHINESE · CHEAT SHEET

How to Say But in Chinese

But is 但是 (dànshì). In conversation you'll also hear 可是 (kěshì) and the softer 不过 (búguò). Here's when to use each, where 却 (què) goes, and why Chinese says although and but in the same sentence.



但是 dànshì But

Sounds like dahn-shir. dàn falls: 4th tone, shì falls: 4th tone. With although: 虽然 (suīrán), Although.

Which but fits?

A plain contrast	我想去，但是我没时间。 Wǒ xiǎng qù, dànshì wǒ méi shíjiān. I want to go, but I don't have time.
Disappointed	可是你答应过我的！ Kěshì nǐ dāying guo wǒ de! But you promised me!
A gentle no	谢谢你，不过我已经吃了。 Xièxie nǐ, búguò wǒ yǐjīng chī le. Thank you, but I've already eaten.
A small catch	这家店很好吃，就是有点贵。 Zhè jiā diàn hěn hǎochī, jiùshì yǒudiǎn guì. This place is delicious, it's just a bit pricey.
Although… but	虽然很累，但是很开心。 Suīrán hěn lèi, dànshì hěn kāixīn. Although I'm tired, I'm happy.
An essay or report	然而，问题并没有解决。 Rán'ér, wèntí bìng méiyǒu jiějué. However, the problem was not solved.

9 ways to say but in Chinese

EVERYDAY BUT

但是 dànshì But EVERYDAY

可是 kěshì But CASUAL

不过 búguò But, though EVERYDAY

ALTHOUGH… BUT

虽然 suīrán Although EVERYDAY

却 què Yet, but EVERYDAY

SOFTER: IT'S JUST THAT

只是 zhǐshì It's just that EVERYDAY

就是 jiùshì Only, the thing is CASUAL

IN WRITING

然而 rán'ér However FORMAL

而 ér While, whereas FORMAL

But in short exchanges

AN INVITATION

A: 周末一起去爬山吧？ Zhōumò yìqǐ qù páshān ba? Want to go hiking this weekend?

B: 我很想去，不过周六要加班。 Wǒ hěn xiǎng qù, búguò zhōuliù yào jiābān. I'd love to, but I have to work Saturday.

AT A SHOP

A: 这件怎么样？ Zhè jiàn zěnmeyàng? How about this one?

B: 很好看，可是太贵了。 Hěn hǎokàn, kěshì tài guì le. It looks great, but it's too expensive.

AT WORK

A: 方案可以吗？ Fāng'àn kěyǐ ma? Does the plan work?

B: 可以，只是时间有点紧。 Kěyǐ, zhǐshì shíjiān yǒudiǎn jǐn. Yes, it's just that the timeline is a bit tight.

What to avoid, and why

- × Don't put 却 (què) at the start of a sentence. It goes after the subject: 我等了很久，他却没来 (wǒ děng le hěn jiǔ, tā què méi lái), I waited a long time, yet he didn't come.
- × Don't use 然而 (rán'ér) in a chat. It sounds like a news report. Say 但是 (dànshì) or 不过 (búguò).
- × Don't drop 但是 (dànshì) after 虽然 (suīrán) because English does. A sentence with 虽然 (suīrán) feels unfinished without 但是 (dànshì), 可是 (kěshì) or 却 (què).

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