

CHAPTER ONE

SURVIVAL CHINESE

If you tire of toting around this phrasebook, tear out this chapter. You should be able to navigate your destination with only the terms found in the next 30 pages. *For an explanation of pronunciations (including tone markings), please see "Chinese Grammar & Pronunciation Basics," later in this chapter.*

BASIC GREETINGS

For a full list of greetings, see p89.

Hello.

您好。

nín hǎo。

How are you?

您好吗？

nín hǎo ma?

I'm fine, thanks.

我很好，谢谢。

wǒ hěn hǎo, xiè xiè。

And you?

您呢？

nín ne?

My name is ____.

我叫____。

wǒ jiào ____。

And yours?

您呢？

nín ne?

It's a pleasure to meet you.

很高兴见到您。

hěn gāo xìng jiàn dào nín。

Please.

请。

qǐng。

Thank you.

谢谢您。

xiè xiè nín。

Yes.

是的。

shì de。

No.

不是。

bù shì。

Okay.

好。

hǎo。

No problem.

I'm sorry, I don't understand.

Would you speak slower please?

Would you speak louder please?

Do you speak English?

Do you speak any other languages?

I speak _____ better than Chinese.

Would you please repeat that?

Would you point that out in this dictionary?

没问题。

méi wèn tí.

很抱歉，我不懂。

hěn bào qiàn, wǒ bù dǒng.

您能说慢点吗？

nín néng shuō màn diǎn ma?

您能大点声说吗？

nín néng dà diǎn shēng shuō ma?

您说英语吗？

nín shuō yīng yǔ ma?

您说其他语言吗？

nín shuō qí tā yǔ yán ma?

我的_____语说得比汉语好。

wǒ de _____ yǔ shuō dé bǐ

hàn yǔ hǎo.

请再说一遍好吗？

qǐng zài shuō yī biàn hǎo ma?

您能在这本字典里把它指给我看吗？

nín néng zài zhè běn zì diǎn lǐ bǎ tā

zhǐ gěi wǒ kàn ma?

THE KEY QUESTIONS

With the right hand gestures, you can get a lot of mileage from the following list of single-word questions and answers.

Who?

谁？

shéi?

What?

什么？

shí me?

When?

什么时候？

shén me shí hou?

Where?

哪里？

nǎ lǐ?

To where?

到哪里？

dào nǎ lǐ?

Why?

为什么？

wéi shén me?

How?	怎么样? zěn me yàng?
Which?	哪一个? nǎ yī gè?
How many? / How much?	多少? duō shǎo?

THE ANSWERS: WHO

For full coverage of pronouns, see p22.

I / me	我 wǒ
you (familiar, formal, plural)	你 / 您 / 你们 nǐ / nín / nǐ mén
he / him	他 tā
she / her	她 tā
we / us	我们 wǒ mén
they / them	他们 tā mén

THE ANSWERS: WHEN

For full coverage of time, see p12.

now	现在 xiàn zài
later	稍后 shāo hòu
afterwards	以后 yǐ hòu
earlier	更早 / 早一点 gèng zǎo / zǎo yī diǎn
in a minute	马上 mǎ shàng
today	今天 jīn tiān



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tomorrow	明天 <i>míng tiān</i>
yesterday	昨天 <i>zuó tiān</i>
the day after tomorrow	后天 <i>hòu tiān</i>
the day before yesterday	前天 <i>qián tiān</i>
in a week	一周内 <i>yī zhōu nèi</i>
next week	下周 <i>xià zhōu</i>
last week	上周 <i>shàng zhōu</i>
next month	下个月 <i>xià gè yuè</i>
last month	上个月 <i>shàng gè yuè</i>
At _____	在_____
ten o'clock this morning.	今天上午十点。 <i>jīn tiān shàng wǔ shí diǎn。</i>
two o'clock this afternoon.	今天下午两点。 <i>Jīn tiān xià wǔ liǎng diǎn。</i>
seven o'clock this evening.	今天晚上七点。 <i>Jīn tiān wǎn shàng qī diǎn。</i>

For full coverage of numbers, see p7.

THE ANSWERS: WHERE

here	这里 <i>zhè lǐ</i>
there	那里 <i>nà lǐ</i>
near	附近 <i>fù jìn</i>

closer	较近 <i>jiào jìn</i>
closest	最近 <i>zuì jìn</i>
far	远 <i>yuǎn</i>
farther	较远 <i>jiào yuǎn</i>
farthest	最远 <i>zuì yuǎn</i>
across from	在...对面 <i>zài ... duì miàn</i>
next to	紧邻 <i>jǐn lín</i>
behind	后面 <i>hòu miàn</i>
straight ahead	一直向前 <i>yī zhí xiàng qián</i>
left	左边 <i>zuǒ biān</i>
right	右边 <i>yòu biān</i>
up	上边 <i>shàng biān</i>
down	下边 <i>xià biān</i>
lower	较低 <i>jiào dī</i>
higher	较高 <i>jiào gāo</i>
forward	向前 <i>xiàng qián</i>
backward	向后 <i>xiàng hòu</i>

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around	周围 zhōu wéi
across the street	街对面 jiē duì miàn
down the street	沿着街道 yán zhe jiē dào
on the corner	在拐角处 zài guǎi jiǎo chù
kitty-corner	斜对角 xié duì jiǎo
_____ blocks from here	离这里_____条街远的地方 lí zhè lǐ _____ tiáo jiē yuǎn de dì fāng

For a full list of numbers, see the next page.

THE ANSWERS: WHICH

this (this one)	这个 zhè gè
that (that one)	那个 nà gè
these (these here)	这些 zhè xiē
those (those there, close by)	那些 nà xiē

HELP / EMERGENCIES

Can you help me?	您能帮帮我吗? nín néng bāng bāng wǒ ma?
I'm lost.	我迷路了 wǒ mí lù le
Help!	救命! jiù mìng!
Call the police!	打电话叫警察! dǎ diàn huà jiào jīng chá!
I need a doctor.	我要看医生。 wǒ yào kàn yī shēng.

Thief!

抓小偷！

My child is missing.

zhuā xiǎo tóu !

我的孩子走失了。

Call an ambulance.

wǒ de hái zǐ zǒu shī le.

打电话叫救护车。

dǎ diàn huà jiào jiù hù chē.

NUMBERS & COUNTING

one	一 <i>yī</i>	fifteen	十五 <i>shí wǔ</i>
two	二 <i>èr</i>	sixteen	十六 <i>shí liù</i>
three	三 <i>sān</i>	seventeen	十七 <i>shí qī</i>
four	四 <i>sì</i>	eighteen	十八 <i>shí bā</i>
five	五 <i>wǔ</i>	nineteen	十九 <i>shí jiǔ</i>
six	六 <i>liù</i>	twenty	二十 <i>èr shí</i>
seven	七 <i>qī</i>	twenty-one	二十一 <i>èr shí yī</i>
eight	八 <i>bā</i>	thirty	三十 <i>sān shí</i>
nine	九 <i>jiǔ</i>	forty	四十 <i>sì shí</i>
ten	十 <i>shí</i>	fifty	五十 <i>wǔ shí</i>
eleven	十一 <i>shí yī</i>	sixty	六十 <i>liù shí</i>
twelve	十二 <i>shí èr</i>	seventy	七十 <i>qī shí</i>
thirteen	十三 <i>shí sān</i>	eighty	八十 <i>bā shí</i>
fourteen	十四 <i>shí sì</i>	ninety	九十 <i>jiǔ shí</i>

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one hundred	一百 <i>yī bǎi</i>	one thousand	一千 <i>yī qiān</i>
two hundred	二百 <i>èr bǎi</i>		

FRACTIONS & DECIMALS

one eighth	八分之一 <i>bā fēn zhī yī</i>
one quarter	四分之一 <i>sì fēn zhī yī</i>
one third	三分之一 <i>sān fēn zhī yī</i>
one half	二分之一 / 一半 <i>èr fēn zhī yī / yī bàn</i>
two thirds	三分之二 <i>sān fēn zhī èr</i>
three quarters	四分之三 <i>sì fēn zhī sān</i>
double	两倍 <i>liǎng bèi</i>
triple	三倍 <i>sān bèi</i>
one tenth	十分之一 <i>shí fēn zhī yī</i>
one hundredth	百分之一 <i>bǎi fēn zhī yī</i>
one thousandth	千分之一 <i>qiān fēn zhī yī</i>

MATH

addition	加 <i>jiā</i>
2 + 1	二加一 <i>èr jiā yī</i>
subtraction	减 <i>jiǎn</i>

2 - 1

二减一

èr jiǎn yī

multiplication

乘

chéng

2 × 3

二乘以三

èr chéng yǐ sān

division

除

chú

6 ÷ 3

六除以三

*liù chú yǐ sān***ORDINAL NUMBERS**

first

第一

dì yī

second

第二

dì èr

third

第三

dì sān

fourth

第四

dì sì

fifth

第五

dì wǔ

sixth

第六

dì liù

seventh

第七

dì qī

eighth

第八

dì bā

ninth

第九

dì jiǔ

tenth

第十

dì shí

last

最后

zuì hòu

MEASUREMENTS

Measurements will usually be metric, though you may need a few American measurement terms.

inch	英寸 <i>yīng cùn</i>
foot	英尺 <i>yīng chǐ</i>
mile	英里 <i>yīng lǐ</i>
millimeter	毫米 <i>háo mǐ</i>
centimeter	厘米 <i>lí mǐ</i>
meter	米 <i>mǐ</i>
kilometer	千米 / 公里 <i>qiān mǐ / gōng lǐ</i>
hectare	公顷 <i>gōng qǐng</i>
squared	平方 <i>píng fāng</i>
milliliters	毫升 <i>háo shēng</i>
liter	升 / 公升 <i>shēng / gōng shēng</i>
kilo	千 <i>qiān</i>
ounce	盎司 <i>àng sī</i>
cup	杯 <i>bēi</i>
pint	品脱 <i>pǐn tuō</i>
quart	夸脱 <i>kuā tuō</i>

gallon

加仑
*jiā lún***QUANTITY**

some

一些
yī xiē

none

一个也没有
yī gè yě méi yǒu

all

全部
quán bù

many / much

许多
*xǔ duō*a little bit (can be used for
quantity or for time)一点
yī diǎn

a dozen

一打
yī dǎ

too much

太多了
tài duō le

not enough

不够
*bú gòu***SIZE**

short

短
duǎn

long

长
cháng

small

小的
xiǎo de

the smallest

最小的
zuì xiǎo de

medium

中等的
zhōng děng de

big

大的
dà de

the biggest

最大的
zuì dà de

fat	胖的 <i>pàng de</i>
wide	宽的 <i>kuān de</i>
narrow	窄的 <i>zhǎi de</i>

TIME

When the Chinese tell time, the period of the day is stated before the exact hour (early morning, noon, afternoon and evening). All of China is officially on one time zone, despite the great distances from one province to the next.

For full coverage of number terms, see p7.

HOURS OF THE DAY

What time is it?	现在几点钟? <i>xiàn zài jǐ diǎn zhōng?</i>
At what time?	在几点钟? <i>zài jǐ diǎn zhōng?</i>
For how long?	多长时间? <i>duō cháng shí jiān?</i>
It's one o'clock.	现在一点钟。 <i>xiàn zài yī diǎn zhōng.</i>
It's two o'clock.	现在两点钟。 <i>xiàn zài liǎng diǎn zhōng.</i>
It's two thirty.	现在两点半。 <i>xiàn zài liǎng diǎn bàn.</i>
It's two fifteen.	现在两点一刻。 <i>xiàn zài liǎng diǎn yī kè.</i>
It's a quarter to three.	现在两点四十五分。 <i>xiàn zài liǎng diǎn sì shí wǔ fēn.</i>
It's noon.	现在是中午。 <i>xiàn zài shì zhōng wǔ.</i>
It's midnight.	现在是午夜。 <i>xiàn zài shì wǔ yè.</i>

It's early.	现在还早。 <i>xiàn zài hái zǎo.</i>
It's late.	现在晚了。 <i>xiàn zài wǎn le.</i>
in the morning	在上午 <i>zài shàng wǔ</i>
in the afternoon	在下午 <i>zài xià wǔ</i>
at night	在晚上 <i>zài wǎn shàng</i>
at dawn	天亮 <i>tiān liàng</i>

DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	星期日 <i>xīng qī rì</i>
Monday	星期一 <i>xīng qī yī</i>
Tuesday	星期二 <i>xīng qī èr</i>
Wednesday	星期三 <i>xīng qī sān</i>
Thursday	星期四 <i>xīng qī sì</i>
Friday	星期五 <i>xīng qī wǔ</i>
Saturday	星期六 <i>xīng qī liù</i>

MONTHS OF THE YEAR

January	一月 <i>yī yuè</i>
February	二月 <i>èr yuè</i>
March	三月 <i>sān yuè</i>

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April	四月 <i>sì yuè</i>
May	五月 <i>wǔ yuè</i>
June	六月 <i>liù yuè</i>
July	七月 <i>qī yuè</i>
August	八月 <i>bā yuè</i>
September	九月 <i>jiǔ yuè</i>
October	十月 <i>shí yuè</i>
November	十一月 <i>shí yī yuè</i>
December	十二月 <i>shí èr yuè</i>
next month	下个月 <i>xià gè yuè</i>
last month	上个月 <i>shàng gè yuè</i>

SEASONS OF THE YEAR

in spring	春天 <i>chūn tiān</i>
in summer	夏天 <i>xià tiān</i>
in autumn	秋天 <i>qiū tiān</i>
in winter	冬天 <i>dōng tiān</i>

CHINESE GRAMMAR & PRONUNCIATION BASICS

THE ALPHABET

While there is no alphabet in Chinese, each morpheme (the smallest unit of meaning in a language) is represented by one syllable, which in turn consists of an initial sound and a final sound, and which is always uttered in one of the four tones which characterize the Mandarin dialect.

PINYIN AND CHINA'S WRITTEN LANGUAGE

The official Romanization system of the People's Republic of China (PRC), "pinyin" literally means "to spell the way it sounds." Adopted in the 1950s, it became China's official Romanization system in 1979. While English is not commonly found on street signs or storefronts in China, pinyin is ubiquitous, so boning up on the basics in advance of your trip is well worth the effort. Since Chinese written characters don't necessarily give any indication of pronunciation, the Chinese themselves are taught pinyin in school in addition to the characters. In the Republic of China a mixture of various Romanization systems, including pinyin, is currently used.

As a point of reference, Chinese characters date to the earliest dynasty with archaeological evidence, the Shang (1766–1122 BC), and were originally used for divination purposes.

They can be read left to right, right to left, or top to bottom. The four most common types of characters, reflecting meanings and sounds, include: **pictographs**, which are formed according to the shape of the objects themselves, such as the sun and the moon, and indicate the meaning of the character rather than the sound; **ideographs**, which represent more abstract concepts; **complex ideographs**, which are

combinations of simpler characters; and phonetic compounds, also called **logographs**, formed by two elements—one hinting at the meaning of the word and the other giving a clue as to the sound. This last category accounts for over 80% of all Chinese characters.

When the PRC was established in 1949, the literacy rate hovered around 15%. To simplify the Chinese writing system so that the vast majority of Chinese could attain an adequate level of literacy, the number of strokes required to create many characters was greatly reduced. The resulting characters are known as "simplified" characters and are used in the modern-day PRC, where the literacy rate has climbed to 85%. "Traditional" (long form) characters are still taught and used in Taiwan. Using simplified characters in Taiwan can be construed as making a political statement, and is best avoided if you are having business material translated into Chinese and printed for use in Taiwan.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Initial Sounds

In Chinese, initials are always comprised of consonants, which are much more numerous than the final vowel sounds, and are represented in the pinyin Romanization system as follows:

Initial	Sound	Pronunciation
b	baw	<i>bore</i>
p	paw	<i>pour</i>
m	maw	<i>mourn</i>
f	faw	<i>four</i>
d	duh	<i>dull</i>
t	tuh	<i>ton</i>
n	nuh	<i>null</i>
l	luh	<i>lull</i>
g	guh	<i>gum</i>
k	kuh	<i>come</i>
h	huh	<i>hum</i>

j	gee	<i>gee</i>
q	chee	<i>cheese</i>
x	she	<i>she</i>
z	dzuh	<i>"ds" as in suds</i>
c	tsuh	<i>"ts" as in cuts</i>
s	suh	<i>son</i>
zh	jir	<i>germ</i>
ch	chir	<i>chirp</i>
sh	shir	<i>shirt</i>
r	ir	<i>"er" as in larger</i>
w	wuh	<i>what</i>
y	yuh	<i>yum</i>

Final Sounds

There are only six vowel sounds in standard Mandarin: a, o, e, i, u, and ü. Pronouncing the vowels in sequence, your mouth will start off very wide and your tongue will start off very low. Vowels can be combined to form compound vowels, listed below:

Final	Sound	Pronunciation
a	ah	<i>not</i>
ai	i	<i>eye</i>
ao	ow	<i>chow</i>
an	ahn	<i>on</i>
ang	ahng	<i>thong</i>
o	aw	<i>draw</i>
ong	oong	<i>too+ng</i>
ou	oh	<i>toe</i>
e	uh	<i>bush</i>
ei	ay	<i>way</i>
en	un	<i>none</i>
eng	ung	<i>strung</i>
er	ar	<i>star</i>
i	ee	<i>bee</i>

ia	ya	<i>gotcha</i>
iao	yaow	<i>meow</i>
ie	yeh	<i>yet</i>
iu	yo	<i>leo</i>
ian	yan	<i>Cheyenne</i>
iang	yahng	<i>y+angst</i>
in	een	<i>seen</i>
ing	eeng	<i>ping</i>
iong	yoong	<i>you+ng</i>
u	oo	<i>too</i>
ua	wa	<i>suave</i>
uo	waw	<i>war</i>
ui	way	<i>sway</i>
uai	why	<i>why</i>
uan	wan	<i>want</i>
un	one	<i>won</i>
uang	wahng	<i>wan+ng</i>
ueng	wung	<i>one+ng</i>
ü	yew	<i>ewe</i>
üe	yweh	<i>you+eh</i>
üan	ywan	<i>you+wan</i>
ün	yewn	<i>you+n</i>

Tones

In the pinyin system of Romanization, tone marks always appear above the vowel. If there are consecutive vowels, the tone mark appears above the first vowel in that sequence. The only exception to this is for the vowels *iu* and *ui*, where the tone mark falls on the second vowel.

In a spoken language with a great number of homophones, tones are the key to understanding the meaning of what is being said. Even so, any given syllable with a specific tone can also often have more than one meaning. Ultimately only by viewing the written character can the meaning be deduced on the spot. When dealing with spoken Chinese, the meaning must be deduced in large part from the context of what else is being said.

Mandarin has the following four tones:

First tone: High level. This tone should be as high as your individual pitch range can be, and is indicated by a horizontal line above the vowel: ā

Second tone: Rising. This tone should have your voice going up as if asking a question, and is indicated by a line which rises from left to right above the vowel: á

Third tone: Dipping then rising. This tone starts in the middle level of your voice range and then falls before slightly rising again at the end. It is indicated by a reverse triangle without the horizontal line on top, located above the vowel: ǎ

Fourth tone: Falling. This tone sounds as if you're giving an order, falling from the high pitch level it starts at. It is indicated by a line dropping from left to right above the vowel: à

Other Tone Rules

Two Consecutive Third Tones: When one third tone is followed by another, the first third tone is spoken like a second tone (rising), and only the second third tone exhibits the characteristics of a full third tone (falling and then rising again).

Half-Third Tones: When one third tone is followed by any other tone, only the first half (the falling half) of the tone is pronounced before the remaining syllables are pronounced with their respective tones. It sounds more like a low, level tone.

Neutral Tones: Although there are four primary tones in Mandarin, a fifth tone exists which is actually toneless, or neutral. There is no tone mark above a fifth tone, and you say it only when you attach it to grammatical particles or the second character of repetitive syllables such as bàba (father) or māma (mother).

THE MONOSYLLABLE MYTH

Since each Chinese character is pronounced as a single syllable, people often think that Chinese is monosyllabic. The truth is that most Chinese words are polysyllabic and are written in clusters of characters. Most words in modern Chinese are two syllables (two characters). For example, míng means "clear, bright" and bái means "white, blank." Put together, míngbái means "understand, clear."

TERMS FOR MANDARIN

Standard Mandarin, the official language of both the PRC and the ROC, is referred to as **pǔtōnghuà** ("the common language") in the PRC, and **guóyǔ** ("national speech") in the ROC.

Tonal Changes in Yī and Bù

Yī (one) and **bù** (not or no) are unusual in that their tones may change depending on what comes after them. **Yī** by itself is pronounced with the first tone, but when a first, second or third tone follows it, **yī** is spoken with a fourth tone, such as in **yìzhāng zhǐ** (a piece of paper). If a fourth tone follows **yī** it automatically becomes a second tone, such as in the word **yíyàng** (the same).

ELEMENTS OF CHINESE GRAMMAR

Sentence Structure

In general the way to tell how one part of a Chinese sentence relates to another is by the use of particles and the order of the words (syntax) rather than morphology (changes in the form of the word through inflection).

The basic word order of Chinese is exactly the same as in English: Subject-Verb-Object:

Subject	Verb	Object
I (wǒ)	love (xǐ huān)	spinach (bōcài)
You (nǐ)	read (kàn)	books (shū)

While Chinese word order resembles English, most everything else about the language differs. There are no gender-specific nouns in Chinese, no distinction between singular and plural, no verb conjugation, no such thing as first, second, or third person, no such thing as active or passive voices, or even past or present tense. Additionally, one word can function as both subject and object. Context is often the only way one knows when an action may have taken place.

Personal Pronouns

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
I	wǒ	waw
You	nǐ	nee
He / She / It	tā	tah
We	wǒ mén	waw-mun
You (Plural)	nǐ mén	nee-mun
They	tā mén	tah-mun

Classifiers

Classifiers, also referred to as measure words, help classify particular nouns, and are located in between a number (or a demonstrative pronoun such as "this" or "that") and a noun. They're similar to English words such as a "gaggle" of geese or a "school" of fish. While English doesn't use classifiers nearly as often as Chinese, in Chinese they can be found wherever a number is followed by a noun, or an implied noun. The most common classifier is "ge" (guh), which can safely be used when in doubt.

Classifier	Pinyin	Pronunciation
Printed and bound things (such as books or magazines)	běn	bun
Stick-like things, such as string or blades of grass	gēn	gun
Things with flat surfaces such as tables or beds	zhāng	jahng
Round, tiny things such as pearls	kē	kuh

Subject	Verb	Number	Classifier	Object
I	want	a / one		book
Wǒ	yào	yī	bēn	shū
You	buy	three		tables
Nǐ	mǎi	sān	zhāng	zhuō zi

This & That

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
This	zhè (ge)	jay (guh)
That	nà (ge)	nah (guh)
These	zhè xiē	jay-shyeh
Those	nà xiē	nay-shyeh

Definite vs. Indefinite Articles

Equivalents to the English articles "a," "an," and "the" do not exist in Chinese. The only way to tell if something is being referred to specifically (definite) or just generally (indefinite) is by the word order.

Nouns that refer specifically to something are usually found at the beginning of a sentence before the verb:

yǐ zi zài nàr. (The chairs are there.)

hái zi xǐ huān tā. (The child likes him.)

dāo zài zhuō zi shàng. (The knife / knives are on the table.)

Nouns that refer to something more general are usually found at the end of the sentence, after the verb:

nǎ r yǒu shū? (Where are some books? / Where is there a book?)

nà r yǒu shū. (There are some books over there.)

zhè ge yǒu wèn tí. (There's a problem with this. / There are some problems with this.)

Exceptions to Definite vs. Indefinite Articles

Several exceptions to the above rules on definite vs. indefinite articles exist in Chinese:

- If a noun is at the beginning of a sentence it might refer to something indefinite if the sentence makes a general comment (as opposed to relating an entire story), like when the verb **shì** is part of the comment: **xióng māo shì dòng wù.** (Pandas are animals.)
- If an adjective appears after the noun it might also indicate an indefinite article: **pú tao hěn tián.** (Grapes are very sweet.)
- If an auxiliary verb exists it might also indicate an indefinite article: **māo huì zhuā lǎo shǔ.** (Cats can catch mice.)
- If a verb indicates that the action occurs habitually it may indicate an indefinite article: **niú chī cǎo.** (Cows eat grass.)
- Nouns preceded by a numeral and a classifier are considered definite: **wǔ gè xué sheng dōu hěn cōng míng.** (The five students are all quite smart.)
- If the word **yǒu** (to exist) comes before the noun and is then followed by a verb, it can also indicate an indefinite article: **yǒu shū zài zhuō zi shàng.** (There are books on top of the table.)
- Finally, if the word **zhè** (this) or **nà** (that), plus a classifier is used when a noun comes after the verb, it indicates a definite reference: **wǒ yào mǎi nà zhāng huà.** (I want to buy that painting.)

Adjectives

If an adjective is pronounced with only one syllable it appears immediately in front of the noun it qualifies:

lǜ chá (green tea)

cháng gǔ tóu (long bone)

If the adjective has two syllables, however, the possessive particle *de* (duh) is placed between it and whatever it qualifies:

gàn jìng de yī fu (clean clothes)

chǎo nào de hái zi (noisy child / children)

If a numeral is followed by a classifier, those should both go in front of the adjective and whatever it qualifies:

yī jiàn xīn yī fu (a [piece of] new clothing)

sì běn yǒu qù de shū (four interesting books)

Finally, when an adjective is also the predicate, appearing at the end of a sentence, it follows the subject or the topic without needing the verb *shì* (shir; to be):

tā de fáng zi hěn gān jìng. (His house [is] very clean.)

nà jiàn yī fu tài jiù. (That piece of clothing [is] too old.)

Verbs

There is no conjugation of verbs in Chinese. The verb in the sentence "They eat Chinese food" is said the same way as in the sentence "He eats Chinese food." There are ways to indicate tense in Chinese sentences, but these are noted in the section on "Aspect Markers" below. The verb itself is never inflected. Below are some of the most common verbs in Chinese:

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
To read	kàn	kahn
I read books.	wǒ kàn shū.	Waw kahn shoo.
To have	yǒu	yo
We have books.	wǒ mén yǒu shū.	Waw mun yo shoo.
To want	yào	yow
She wants cake.	tā yào dàn gāo.	Tah yow dahn gow.
To Be	shì	shir
We are Chinese.	wǒ mén shì zhōng guó rén.	Waw mun shir joong gwaw run.
To study	xué xí	shweh she
You study Chinese.	nǐ xué xí hàn yǔ.	Nee shweh she hahn yew.
To know	zhī dào	jir dow
I know him.	wǒ zhī dào tā.	Waw jir dow tah.

NOTE: The verb **yǒu** (to have) can also be translated as "there is" or "there are." Examples: **yǒu hěn duō hái zi** (There are many children); **wǒ yǒu hěn duō hái zi.** (I have many children.)

Aspect Markers

Aspects characterize the Chinese language in place of tense and refer to how a speaker views an event or a state of being. There are only two aspects in Chinese: complete and continuous, as opposed to English, which has many different aspects such as indefinite, continuous, perfect, perfect continuous, etc.

Le

Le indicates an action has been completed if it's used as a suffix to a verb:

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
You bought many books.	nǐ mǎi le hěn duō shū.	Nee my luh hun dwaw shoo.
He brought his umbrella.	tā dài le tā de yǔ sǎn.	Tah dye luh tah duh yew sahn.

Le in Questions

To turn statements with le into questions, add meiyou at the end of them, which automatically negates the action completed by le:

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
You bought many books.	nǐ mǎi le hěn duō shū.	Nee my luh hun dwaw shoo.
Did he bring his umbrella?	tā yǒu méi yǒu dài tā de yǔ sǎn?	Tah yo mayo dye tah duh yew sahn?

Guò

Guò indicates that something has been done at one time or another, even though it is not currently happening.

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
He has been to France.	tā qù guò fǎ guó.	Tah chyw gwaw fah gwaw.
We have eaten French food.	wǒ mén chī guò fǎ guó cài.	Waw mun chir gwaw fah gwaw tsye.

Zài

Zài indicates if an action is currently happening as you speak. You can also add the word **zhèng** in front of it to add emphasis, which can be translated as "to be right in the middle of" doing something.

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
We are eating.	wǒ mén zài chī fàn.	Waw mun dzye chir fahn.
We're in the middle of eating.	wǒ mén zhèng zài chī fàn.	Waw mun juhng dzye chir fahn.
Your father is cooking.	nǐ bà ba zài zuò fàn.	Nee bah bah dzye dzwaw fahn.
Your father is right in the middle of cooking.	nǐ bà ba zhèng zài zuò fàn.	Nee bah bah juhng dzye dzwaw fahn.

Zhe

To indicate continual action resulting from something else, add the syllable **zhe** to the end of the verb:

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
He's wearing a red hat.	tā dài zhe yī dǐng hóng mào zi.	Tah dye juh ee deeng hoong maow dzuh.
You're wearing a yellow shirt.	nín chuān zhe yī jiàn huáng chèn shān.	Nee chwahn juh ee jyan hwahng chun shahn.

Zhe can also indicate two actions occurring at the same time:

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
She's sitting and eating.	tā zài zuò zhe chī fàn.	Tah dzye dzwaw juh chir fahn.
He's singing while he walks.	tā zǒu zhe chàng gē.	Tah dzoe juh chahng guh.

Negation

Bù

Bù can negate something done in the past, present or anticipated for the future.

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
She didn't like to eat spinach when she was young.	tā xiǎo de shí hòu bù xǐ huān chī bō cài.	Tah shyaw duh shir ho boo she hwahn chir baw tsye.
They don't want to sing.	tā men bú yào chàng gē.	Tah mun boo yow chahng guh.
The restaurant won't be open on Friday.	fàn diàn xīng qī wǔ bù kāi mén.	Fahn dyan sheeng chee woo boo kye mun.

Méi yǒu

To negate the verb **yǒu**, the usual negative prefix **bù** cannot be used. Instead you must use the prefix **méi**.

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
We don't have books.	wǒ mén méi yǒu shū.	Waw mun may yo shoo.
They don't have dogs.	tā mén méi yǒu gǒu.	Tah mun may yo go.

Questions

The simplest way to ask a question in Chinese is to end any statement with the particle **ma**.

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
Does he read?	tā kàn shū ma?	Tah kahn shoo mah?
Do you speak English?	nǐ shuō yīng yǔ ma?	Nee shwaw eeng yew mah?

Alternative choice questions

Another way to pose questions is by repeating the verb in its negative form by inserting **bù** in between the repeating verbs. This form can only be used for a yes or no question.

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
Are you an American?	nǐ shì bù shì měi guó rén?	Nee shir boo shir may gwaw run?
Does she want children?	tā yào bù yào hái zi?	Ta yow boo yow hi dzuh?

Interrogative pronouns

Another way to ask questions in Chinese is by using the following interrogative pronouns:

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
Who / whom	shéi	shay
Whose	shéi de	shay duh
What	shénme	shummah
Which	nǎ (+ classifier)	nah
Where	nǎr	nar

Possessives

The particle **de** is attached to the end of a pronoun or other modifier to indicate possession.

English	Pinyin	Pronunciation
My computer has Internet.	wǒ de jì suàn jī yǒu yīn tè wǎng.	Waw duh dyan now yo een tuh wahng.
Does yours?	nǐ de ne?	Nee duh nuh?