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Mandarin Chinese is the official language of Mainland [China](#) and [Taiwan](#), and is one of the official languages of [Singapore](#). In English, it is often just called "Mandarin" or "Chinese". In China, it is called *Putonghua* (普通话), meaning "common speech", while in Taiwan it is referred to as *Guoyu* (國語), "the national language." It has been the **main language of education in China** (excluding [Hong Kong](#) and [Macau](#)) since the 1950s. Standard Mandarin is close to, but not quite identical with, the Mandarin dialect of the [Beijing](#) area. In Singapore, it is officially referred to as *HuaYu* (华语).

Note that while the spoken Mandarin in the above places is more or less the same, the written characters are different. Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau all still use [traditional characters](#), whereas Mainland China and Singapore use a simplified derivative. Educated people living in Mainland China or Singapore can still understand traditional character with no problem but not vice versa, for example Taiwanese people may have difficulty recognising some simplified characters.

Understand

Note that "dialect" has a different meaning when applied to Chinese from when it is applied to other languages.

Chinese "dialects" are mutually unintelligible, as different as, say, [Italian](#) and [French](#), which we would call "related languages" rather than "dialects" - using a pure linguistic definition they are distinct "languages".

All Chinese dialects, in general, use the same set of characters in reading and writing. A [Cantonese](#) speaker and a Mandarin speaker cannot talk to each other, but either can generally read what the other writes. Even a speaker of [Japanese](#) or [Korean](#) will recognise many characters.

While formal written Chinese is the same everywhere, there can be significant differences when the "dialects" are written in colloquial form. For example Cantonese as used in Hong Kong, more informal phrasings are used in everyday speech than what would be written. Thus, there are some extra characters that are sometimes used in addition to the common characters to represent the spoken dialect and other colloquial words.

One additional complication is that mainland [China](#) and [Singapore](#) use **simplified characters**, a long-debated change completed by the mainland Chinese government in 1956 to facilitate the standardization of language across China's broad minority groups and sub-dialects of Mandarin and other Chinese languages. Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and many overseas Chinese still use the **traditional characters**. In addition, the Dungan language, which is spoken in some parts of neighbouring countries, is considered to be a variant of Mandarin but uses the Cyrillic alphabet instead of Chinese characters.

About one fifth of the people in the world speak some form of Chinese as their native language. It is a tonal language that is related to *Burmese* and *Tibetan*. Although [Japanese](#) and [Korean](#) use Chinese written characters the spoken languages are not related to Chinese. Also, the unrelated Vietnamese language (which uses a distinctive version of the Latin alphabet) language has borrowed many words from Chinese and at one time used Chinese characters as well.

Travellers headed for [Guangdong](#), [Guangxi](#), [Hong Kong](#) or [Macau](#) may find [Cantonese](#) more useful than Mandarin. Those heading for [Taiwan](#) or southern [Fujian](#) may find the [Minnan](#) dialect useful as well.

Chinese, like most other Asian languages such as [Arabic](#), is famous for being difficult to learn. While English speakers would initially have problems with the tones and recognizing the many different characters (Chinese has no alphabet), the grammar is very simple and can be picked up very easily. Most notably, Chinese grammar does not have conjugation, tenses, gender, plurals or other grammatical rules found in other major languages such as English or [French](#).

Pronunciation guide

The pronunciation guide below uses [Hanyu pinyin](#), the official romanization of the [People's Republic of China](#). Until recently, [Taiwan](#) used the [Wade-Giles](#) system, which is quite different, then switched to [Tongyong pinyin](#), only slightly different from Hanyu pinyin, and now officially uses Hanyu pinyin just like the People's Republic.

Pinyin allows very accurate pronunciation of Chinese *if you understand how it works*, but the way that it uses letters like *q*, *x*, *c*, *z* and even *i* is not at all intuitive to the English speaker. Studying the pronunciation guide below carefully is thus essential. After you master the pronunciation you still may not be understood, its time to move on to the next challenge, speaking the accurate tones.

Some pinyin vowels (especially "e", "i", "ü") can be tricky, so it is best to get a native speaker to demonstrate. Also, beware of the spelling rules listed in the [exceptions](#) below.

- a as in **father**; otherwise, pronounced as in "**awesome**"
- a in an as "a" in "**cat**" or "**back**" (just the English short "a" sound)
- e unrounded back vowel (IPA [ɤ]), similar to **duh**; in unstressed syllables becomes a schwa (IPA [ə]), like **idea**
- i

as in **see** or **key**;
after *sh, zh, s, z* or *r*, not really a vowel at all but just a stretched-out consonant sound

- o as in **more**
- u as in **soon**; but read **ü** in *ju, qu, yu* and *xu*
- ü as in French **lune** or German **grün**

Diphthongs

These are the diphthongs in Chinese:

- ai as in **pie**
- ao as in **pouch**
- ei as in **pay**
- ia as in **ya**
- ia in 'ian' as in 'yes'
- iao as in **meow**
- ie as in **yes**
- iong as in **Pyongyang**
- ou as in **mow**
- ua as in **what**
- uo as in **war**

Consonants

Chinese stops distinguish between *aspirated* and *unaspirated*, not *voiceless* and *voiced* as in English. Aspirated sounds are pronounced with a distinctive puff of air as they are pronounced in English when at the beginning of a word, while unaspirated sounds are pronounced without the puff, as in English when found in clusters.

Place a hand in front of your mouth and compare **pit** (aspirated) with **spit** (unaspirated) to see the difference.

Unaspirated	Aspirated
b as in spot	p as in pit
d as in do	t as in tongue
g as in skin	k as in king
j as in jeer	q as in cheap
zh as in jungle	ch as in chore
z as in zebra	c as in rats

Here are the other consonants in Chinese:

- m as in **mow**
- f as in **fun**

- n as in **none** or **none**
- l as in **lease** but pronounced like a Spanish "r" in "**rojo**"
- h as in **her**
- x as in **sheep**
- sh as in **shoot**
- r as in **fair**, but can be "zh" as in "pleasure"
- s as in **sag**
- ng as in **sing**
- w as in **wing** but **silent** in *wu*. Before a, ai, ang, eng, and/or o, this may sound like the English v/ German w.
- y as in **yet** but **silent** in *yi, yu*

If you think that is a fairly intimidating repertoire, rest assured that many Chinese people, particularly those who are not native Mandarin speakers, will merge many of the sounds above (especially *q* with *ch* and *j* with *zh*).

Exceptions

There are a fairly large number of niggling exceptions to the basic rules above, based on the position of the sound:

- wu- as **u-**, so 五百 *wubai* is pronounced "**ubai**"
- yi- as **i-**, so 一个 *yige* is pronounced "**ige**"
- yü- as **ü-**, so 豫园 *Yuyuan* is pronounced "**ü-üan**"

Tones

How do I put my tone marks?

If you are confused by how to put tone marks above the Hanyu Pinyin, follow the steps below:

Always insert tone marks above the vowels. If there is more than one vowel letter, follow the steps below:

- (1) Insert it above the 'a' if that letter is present. For example, it is *isrǎo* and not *raǒ*
- (2) If not, insert it above 'o'. For example, *guó* and not *gúo*
- (3) Insert it above the letter 'e' if the letters 'a' and 'o' are not present. For example, *jué* and not *júe*
- (4) If only 'i', 'u' and 'ü' are the only present letters, insert it in the letter that occurs **last**. For example, *jiù* and not *jiu*, *chuí* and not *chúi*. Note, if the vowel present is ü, the tone mark is put **in addition** to the umlaut. For example, *lǜ*

There are four tones in Mandarin that must be followed for proper pronunciation. If you are not used to tonal languages, never underestimate the importance of these tones. Consider a vowel with a different tone as simply a different vowel altogether, and you will realize why Chinese will *not* understand you if you use the wrong tone — *mǎ* is to *mā* as "I want a cake" is to "I want a coke". Be especially wary of questions that have a

falling tone, or conversely exclamations that have an "asking" tone (eg *jǐngchá*, police). In other words, *pronounced like* does not imply *meaning*. While Mandarin speakers also vary their tone just like English speakers do to differentiate a statement from a question and convey emotion, this is much more subtle than in English. Do not try it until you have mastered the basic tones.

1. first tone (ā)
flat, high pitch that is more sung instead of spoken.
2. second tone (á)
low to middle, rising pitch that is pronounced like the end of a question phrase (*What?*).
3. third tone (ǎ)
middle to low to high, dipping pitch: for two consecutive words in the third tone, the first word is pronounced as if it is in the second tone. For example, 打扰 *dǎrǎo* is pronounced as *dárǎo*.
4. fourth tone (à)
high to low, rapidly falling pitch that is pronounced like a command (*Stop!*).
5. fifth tone
neutral pitch that is rarely used by itself (except for phrase particles) but frequently occurring as the second part of a phrase.

Phrase list

All phrases shown in here use the simplified characters used in mainland [China](#) and [Singapore](#). See [Chinese phrasebook - Traditional](#) for a version using the traditional characters still used on [Taiwan](#) and [Hong Kong](#).

Basics

To be or not to be?

Chinese does not have words for "yes" and "no" as such; instead, questions are typically answered by repeating the verb. Here are common examples:

To be or not to be

是 shì, 不是 bú shì

To have or not have / there is or is not

有 yǒu, 没有 méi yǒu

To be right or wrong

对 duì, 不对 bú duì

Hello.

你好。 Nǐ hǎo.

How are you?

你好吗? Nǐ hǎo ma? 身体好吗? Shēntǐ hǎo ma?

Fine, thank you.

很好, 谢谢。 Hěn hǎo, xièxie.

May I please ask, what is your name?

请问你叫什么名? Qǐngwèn nǐjiào shěnméi míng?

What is your name?

你叫什么名字? Nǐ jiào shěnméi míngzi?

My name is _____.

我叫____。 Wǒ jiào _____.

Nice to meet you.

很高兴认识你。 Hěn gāoxìng rènshì nǐ.

Please.

请。 Qǐng.

Thank you.

谢谢。 Xièxiè.

You're welcome.

不客气。 Bú kèqi.

Excuse me. (*getting attention*)

请问 qǐng wèn

Excuse me. (*begging pardon*)

打扰一下。 Dǎrǎo yíxià; 麻烦您了, Máfán nín le.

Excuse me. (*coming through*)

对不起 Duibùqǐ * or * 请让一下 Qǐng ràng yíxià

I'm sorry.

对不起。 Duibùqǐ.

It's okay. (polite response to "I'm sorry")

没关系 (méiguānxi).

Goodbye

再见。 Zàijiàn

Goodbye (*informal*)

拜拜。 Bai-bai (Byebye)

I can't speak Chinese.

我不会说中文。 Wǒ bú huì shuō zhōngwén.

Do you speak English?

你会说英语吗? Nǐ huì shuō Yīngyǔ ma?

Is there someone here who speaks English?

这里有人会说英语吗? Zhèlǐ yǒu rén huì shuō Yīngyǔ ma?

Help! (in emergencies)

救命! Jiùmìng!

Good morning.

早安。 Zǎo'ān.

Good evening.

晚上好。 Wǎnshàng hǎo.

Good night.

晚安。 Wǎn'ān.

I don't understand.

我听不懂。 Wǒ tīng bù dǒng.

Where is the toilet?

厕所在哪里? Cèsuǒ zài nǎlǐ?

Where is the bathroom (polite)?

洗手间在哪里? Xǐshǒujiān zài nǎlǐ?

Problems

Asking a question in Chinese

There are many ways to ask a question in Chinese. Here are two easy ones for travelers...

Verb/Adj. + bù + Verb/Adj.

Example - hǎo bù hǎo? - Are you all right?
(literally - good not good?)

Exception - yǒu méi yǒu? - Do you have? (literally - have not have?)

Sentence + ma

Example - nǐ shì zhōngguó rén ma? - Are you Chinese? (literally - you are chinese + ma)

Leave me alone.

不要打扰我。 (búyào dǎrǎo wǒ)

I don't want it! (useful for people who come up trying to sell you something)

我不要 (wǒ búyào!)

Don't touch me!

不要碰我! (búyào pèng wǒ!)

I'll call the police.

我要叫警察了。 (wǒ yào jiào jǐngchá le)

Police!

警察! (jǐngchá!)

Stop! Thief!

住手! 小偷! (zhùshǒu! xiǎotōu!)

I need your help.

我需要你的帮助。 (wǒ xūyào nǐde bāngzhù)

It's an emergency.

这是紧急情况。 (zhèshì jǐnjí qǐngkuàng)

I'm lost.

我迷路了。(wǒ mílù le)
 I lost my bag.
 我丢了手提包。(wǒ diūle shǒutībāo)
 I lost my wallet.
 我丢了钱包。(wǒ diūle qiánbāo)
 I'm sick.
 我生病了。(wǒ shēngbìng le)
 I've been injured.
 我受伤了。(wǒ shòushāng le)
 I need a doctor.
 我需要医生。(wǒ xūyào yīshēng)
 Can I use your phone?
 我可以打个电话吗?(wǒ kěyǐ dǎ ge diànhuà ma?)

Going to the doctor

I am sick.
 我生病了。(wǒ shēngbìng le)
 Painful.
 痛。(tòng)
 Uncomfortable.
 不舒服。(bù shūfú)
 Itchy/ticklish.
 痒。(yǎng)
 Sore (In muscle strains).
 酸。(suān)
 Fever.
 发烧。(fāshāo)
 Cough.
 咳嗽。(késòu)
 Sneeze.
 打喷嚏。(dǎ pēntì)
 Diarrhoea.
 泻肚子/拉肚子(xiè dùzi/lā dùzi)
 Running nose.
 流鼻涕(liú bíti)
 Phlegm.
 痰。(tán)
 Hands/Arms.
 手。(shǒu)
 Fingers.
 手指。(shǒuzhǐ)
 Wrist.
 手腕。(shǒuwàn)
 Shoulder.
 肩膀。(jiānbǎng)
 Feet.
 脚。(jiǎo)
 Toes.
 脚指。(jiǎozhǐ)
 Legs.
 腿。(tuǐ)
 Nails.
 指甲。(zhǐjiǎ)
 Body.
 身体。(shēntǐ)
 Eyes.
 眼睛。(yǎnjīng)
 Ears.
 耳朵。(ěrduo)
 Nose.
 鼻子。(bízi)
 Face.
 脸。(liǎn)
 Hair.
 头发。(tóufǎ)
 Head.
 头。(tóu)
 Neck.

颈项/脖子。(jǐngxiàng/bózi)
 Throat.
 喉咙。(hóulóng)
 Chest.
 胸。(xiōng)
 Abdomen.
 肚子。(dùzi)
 Hip/Waist.
 腰。(yāo)
 Buttocks.
 屁股。(pìgǔ)
 Back.
 背。(bèi)

Numbers

Chinese numbers are very regular. While Western numerals have become more common, the Chinese numerals shown below are still used, particularly in informal contexts like markets. The characters in parentheses are generally used in financial contexts, such as writing cheques and printing banknotes.

0	〇 (零) líng
1	一 (壹) yī
2	二 (贰) èr (两 liǎng is used when specifying quantities)
3	三 (叁) sān
4	四 (肆) sì
5	五 (伍) wǔ
6	六 (陆) liù
7	七 (柒) qī
8	八 (捌) bā
9	九 (玖) jiǔ
10	十 (拾) shí
11	十一 shí-yī
12	十二 shí-èr
13	十三 shí-sān
14	十四 shí-sì
15	十五 shí-wǔ
16	十六 shí-liù
17	十七 shí-qī
18	十八 shí-bā
19	十九 shí-jiǔ
20	二十 èr-shí
21	二十一 èr-shí-yī
22	二十二 èr-shí-èr
23	

23	二十三 èr-shí-sān
30	三十 sān-shí
40	四十 sì-shí
50	五十 wǔ-shí
60	六十 liù-shí
70	七十 qī-shí
80	八十 bā-shí
90	九十 jiǔ-shí

For numbers above 100, any "gaps" must be filled in with 〇 *líng*, as eg. 一百一 *yībǎiyī* would otherwise be taken as shorthand for "110". A single unit of tens may be written and pronounced either 一十 *yīshí* or just 十 *shí*.

100	一百 (壹佰) yī-bǎi
101	一百〇一 yī-bǎi-líng-yī
110	一百一十 yī-bǎi-yī-shí
111	一百一十一 yī-bǎi-yī-shí-yī
200	二百 èr-bǎi or 两百 : liǎng-bǎi
300	三百 sān-bǎi
500	五百 wǔ-bǎi
1000	一千 (壹仟) yī-qīān
2000	二千 èr-qīān or 两千 liǎng-qīān

Numbers starting from 10,000 are grouped by in units of four digits starting with 万 *wàn* (ten thousand). "One million" in Chinese is thus "hundred ten-thousands" (一百万).

10,000	一万 (壹萬) yī-wàn
10,001	一万〇一 yī-wàn-líng-yī
10,002	一万〇二 yī-wàn-líng-èr
20,000	二万 èr-wàn
50,000	五万 wǔ-wàn
100,000	十万 shí-wàn
200,000	二十万 èr-shí-wàn
1,000,000	一百万 yī-bǎi-wàn
10,000,000	一千万 yī-qīān-wàn
100,000,000	一亿 (壹億) yī-yì
1,000,000,000,000	一兆 yī-zhào

number _____ (*train, bus, etc.*)

number **measure word** (路 *lù*, 号 *hào*, ...) _____ (huǒ chē, gōng gòng qì chē, etc.)

Measure words are used in combination with a number to indicate an amount of mass nouns, similar to how English requires "two *pieces of paper*" rather than just "two paper". [\[1\]](#) When unsure, use 个 (*ge*); even though it may not be correct, you will probably be understood because it is the most common measure word. (One person: 一个人 *yīgè rén*; two apples: 两个苹果 *liǎnggè píngguǒ*; note that two of something always uses 两 *liǎng* rather than 二 *èr*).

half	半 bàn
less than	少於 shǎoyú
more than	多於 duōyú
more	更 gèng

Time

now	现在 xiànzài
later	以后, yǐhòu or shāohòu
before	以前, yǐqián
morning	早上, zǎoshàng
noon	中午, zhōngwǔ
afternoon	下午, xiàwǔ
evening/night	晚上, wǎnshàng
midnight	半夜 bànàyè or 午夜 (wǔyè)

Clock time

What time is it?	现在几点? Xiànzài jǐ diǎn?
It is nine in the morning.	早上9点钟。 Zǎoshàng jiǔ diǎn zhōng.
Three-thirty PM.	下午3点半。 Xiàwǔ sān diǎn bàn.
3:38 PM	下午3点38分 Xiàwǔ sāndiǎn sānshíbā fēn.

Duration

_____ minute(s)	_____ 分钟 fēnzhōng
_____ hour(s)	_____ 小时 xiǎoshí
_____ day(s)	_____ 天 tiān
_____ week(s)	_____ 星期 xīngqī
_____ month(s)	_____ 月 yuè
_____ year(s)	_____ 年 nián

Days

today	今天 jīntiān
yesterday	昨天 zuótiān
the day before yesterday	前天 qiántiān
tomorrow	明天 míngtiān
the day after tomorrow	后天 hòutiān
this week	这个星期 zhè ge xīngqī
last week	上个星期 shàng ge xīngqī
next week	下个星期 xià ge xīngqī

Weekdays in Chinese are easy: starting with 1 for Monday, just add the number after 星期 xīngqī. In [Taiwan](#), 星期 is pronounced xīngqí (second tone on the second syllable).

Sunday	星期天 xīngqītiān or xīngqīrì (星期日)
Monday	星期一 xīngqīyī
Tuesday	星期二 xīngqīèr
Wednesday	星期三 xīngqīsān
Thursday	星期四 xīngqīsì
Friday	星期五 xīngqīwǔ
Saturday	星期六 xīngqīliù

星期 can also be replaced with 礼拜 libài and occasionally 周 zhōu.

Months

Months in Chinese are also easy: starting with 1 for January, just add the number before 月 yuè.

January	一月, yī yuè
February	二月, èr yuè
March	三月, sān yuè
April	四月, sì yuè
May	五月, wǔ yuè
June	六月, liù yuè
July	七月, qī yuè
August	八月, bā yuè
September	九月, jiǔ yuè
October	十月, shí yuè
November	十一月, shí yī yuè
December	十二月, shí èr yuè

From January to December, you just need to use this pattern: number (1-12) + yuè.

Writing Dates

Writing dates in the lunar calendar

If you are attempting to name a date in the Chinese lunar calendar, add the words ‘农历’ before the name of the month to distinguish it from the months of the solar calendar, although it is not strictly necessary. There are some differences: The words 日(rì)/ 号(hào) are generally not required when stating dates in the lunar calendar; it is assumed. Besides that, the 1st Month is called 正月(zhèngyuè). If the number of the day is less than 11, the word 初 is used before the value of the day. Besides that, if the value of the day is more than 20, the word 廿(niàn) is used, so the 23rd day is 廿三 for example.

15th day of the 8th lunar month (the mid-autumn festival)
(农历)八月十五 ((nónglì) bāyuè shí-wǔ).

1st day of the 1st lunar month
(农历)正月初一 ((nónglì) zhèngyuè chūyī).

23rd day of the 9th lunar month
(农历)九月廿三 ((nónglì) jiǔ yuè niànsān).

When writing the date, you name the month (*number (1-12) + yuè*), before inserting the day (*number (1-31) + 日(rì)/ 号(hào)*). Note that the usage of 号(hào), which is more often used in spoken language, is more colloquial than that of 日(rì), which is more often used in written documents.

6th January
一月六号(yī yuè liù hào) or 一月六日(yī yuè liù rì)

25th December
十二月二十五号(shí-èr yuè èr-shí-wǔ hào)

Colours

black	黑色 hēi sè
white	白色 bái sè
grey	灰色 huī sè
red	红色 hóng sè
blue	蓝色 lán sè
yellow	黄色 huáng sè
green	绿色 lǜ sè
orange	橙色 chéng sè
purple	紫色 zǐ sè
brown	褐色 he sè, 棕色 zōng sè,
gold	jīn se

Do you have it in another colour?
你们有没有另外颜色? nǐmen yǒu méiyǒu língwài yánsè ?

Sè means 'colour' so 'hóng sè' is literally 'red colour'. More common for brown and easier to remember is 'coffee colour': 咖啡色 kā fēi sè

Transportation

Bus and Train

How much is a ticket to _____?

去_____的票多少钱 qù _____ de piào duō shǎo qián?

Do you go to... (the central station)?

去不去... (火车站) qù bù qù... (huǒ chē zhàn)

Directions

How do I get to _____ ?

怎么去 _____ zěnme qù _____?

...the train station?

...火车站? ...huǒchē zhàn?

...the bus station?

...汽车总站? ...qìchē zǒngzhàn?

...the airport?

...机场? ...jī chǎng?

street

街 jiē; 路 lù

Turn left.

左边转弯 zuǒbiān zhuǎnwān/左拐zuǒguǎi

Turn right.

右边转弯 yòubiān zhuǎnwān/右拐yòuguǎi

Go straight

一直走 yìzhí zǒu

I've reached my destination

到了 dào le

U-turn

掉头 diàotóu

Taxi driver

师傅 shīfu

Please use the meter machine

请打表 qǐng dǎbiào

Please turn up the aircon/heater

请空调开大点儿。 qǐng kōngtiáo kāi dàdiǎn(r)

left

左边 zuǒbiān

right

右边 yòubiān

straight ahead

往前走 wǎngqián zǒu

north

北 běi

south

南 nán

east

东 dōng

west

西 xī

Taxi

Taxi 出租车 chū zū chē

Take me to _____, please.

请开到_____。 qǐng kāidào _____。

Lodging

Common signs

入口

Entrance [rùkǒu]

出口

Exit [chūkǒu]

推

Push [tuī]

拉

Pull [lā]

厕所 / 洗手间

Toilet [cèsuǒ] / [xǐshǒujiān]

男

Men [nán]

女

Women [nǚ]

禁止

Forbidden [jìnzhǐ]

吸烟

Smoking [xīyān]

Do you have any rooms available?

你们有房间吗? Nǐmen yǒu fángjiān ma?

Does the room come with...

有没有... Yǒu méiyǒu...

...bedsheets?

...床单? ...chuángdān?

...a bathroom?

...浴室? ...yùshì?

...a telephone?

...电话? ...diànhuà?

...a TV?

...电视? ...diànshì?

I will stay for _____ night(s).

我打算住_____夜。 Wǒ dǎsuàn zhù _____ yè.

Do you have a safe?

你们有没有保险箱? Nǐmen yǒu méiyǒu bǎoxiǎn xiāng?

Can you wake me at _____?

请明天早上_____叫醒我。 Qǐng míngtiān zǎoshàng _____ jiàoxǐng wǒ.

I want to check out.

我现在要走。 Wǒ xiànzài yào zǒu.

Money

pay

付 fù

cash

现钱 xiàn qián

credit card

信用卡 xìn yòng kǎ

check

支票 zhīpiào

Eating

Reading a Chinese Menu

Look for these characters to get an idea of what you're ordering. With help from *The Eater's Guide to Chinese Characters* (J. McCawley) and using Simplified Chinese.

dīng	丁 (cubed/diced)
piàn	片 (thinly sliced)
sī	丝 (shredded)
kuài	块 (chunk/cut into bite-sized pieces)
qiú	球 (curled)
chǎo	炒 (stir-fried)
zhá or zhà	炸 (deep-fried)
kǎo	烤 (dry-roasted)
shāo	烧 (roasted w/ sauce)

milk	牛奶 niúǎi
sugar	糖 táng
tea (<i>drink</i>)	茶 chá
green tea	绿茶 lǜ chá
scented tea	花茶 huāchá
black tea	红茶 hóngchá
juice	(水)果汁 (shuǐ)guǒzhī, literally 'fruit juice'.
water	水 shuǐ
natural mineral water	矿泉水 kuàngquán shuǐ
beer	啤酒 pījiǔ
red/white wine	红/白葡萄酒 hóng/bái pútáo jiǔ
It was delicious.	好吃极了。 hǎochī jí le
The check, please.	请结帐。 qǐng jiézhàng

Can I look at the menu, please?

请给我看看菜谱。 qǐng gěi wǒ kànkàn càipǔ.

Do you have an English menu?

你有没有英文菜谱？ nǐ yǒu méi yǒu yīngwén càipǔ?

(Listen for... Yes, we have one. : 有 yǒu - No, we don't. : 没有 méi yǒu)

I'm a vegetarian

我吃素的 wǒ chī sù de

breakfast

早饭 zǎofàn or 早餐 zǎocān

lunch

午饭 wǔfàn or 中餐 zhōngfàn or 午餐 wǔcān

supper

晚饭 wǎnfàn or 晚餐 wǎncān

beef

牛肉 niúròu

pork

猪肉 zhūròu, or sometimes simply '肉' ròu.

mutton

羊肉 yángròu

chicken

鸡 jī

fish

鱼 yú

cheese

奶酪 nǎilào

eggs

鸡蛋 jīdàn

bread

面包 miànbāo

noodles

面条 miàntiáo

fried rice

炒饭 chǎofàn

dumpling

饺子 jiǎozi

rice

米饭 mǐfàn

coffee

咖啡 kāfēi

black coffee: 黑咖啡 hēi kāfēi

Bars

Do you serve alcohol?

卖不卖酒？ (mài búmai jiǔ?)

Is there table service?

有没有餐桌服务？ (yǒu méiyǒu cānzhuō fúwù?)

A beer/two beers, please.

请给我一杯/两杯啤酒。 (qǐng gěi wǒ yìbēi/liǎngbēi pījiǔ)

A glass of red/white wine, please.

请给我一杯红/白葡萄酒。 (qǐng gěi wǒ yìbēi hóng/bái pútáojiǔ)

A pint, please.

请给我一品脱。 (qǐng gěi wǒ yìpīntuō)

A bottle, please.

请给我一瓶。 (qǐng gěi wǒ yìpíng)

_____ (hard liquor) and _____ (mixer), please.

请给我_____和_____。 (qǐng gěi wǒ _____ hé _____)

whiskey

威士忌 (wēishìjì)

vodka

伏特加 (fú tè jiā)

rum

兰姆酒 (lánmǔjiǔ)

water

水 (shuǐ)

mineral spring (i.e. bottled) water

矿泉水 (kuàngquánshuǐ)

boiled water

开水 (kāishuǐ)

club soda

苏打水 (sūdǎshuǐ)

tonic water

通宁水 (tōngníngshuǐ)

orange juice

柳橙汁 (liǔchéngzhī)

Coke (*soda*)

可乐 (kělè)

Do you have any bar snacks?

有没有吧台点心？ (yǒu méiyǒu bātái diǎnxīn?)

One more, please.

请再给我一个。 (qǐng zài gěi wǒ yí gè)

Another round, please.

请再来一轮。(qǐng zàilái yìlún)
When is closing time?
几点打烊、关门?(jǐdiǎn dǎyáng/guānmén?)
Where is the toilet?
厕所在哪里(cèsuǒ zài nǎlǐ?)
Where is the washingroom?
洗手间在哪儿?(xǐshǒujiān zài nǎr?)

Shopping

Do you have this in my size?
有没有我的尺寸?(yǒu méiyǒu wǒde chǐcùn?)
How much is this?
这个多少钱?(zhège duōshǎo qián?)
That's too expensive.
太贵了。(tài guì le)
Would you take _____?
_____元可以吗?(_____ yuán kěyǐ ma?)

expensive
贵(guì)

cheap
便宜(piányi)

I can't afford it.
我带的钱不够。(wǒ dài de qián búgòu)

I don't want it.
我不要。(wǒ bù yào)

You're cheating me.
你欺骗我。(nǐ qīpiàn wǒ) **Use with caution!**

I'm not interested.
我没有兴趣。(wǒ méiyǒu xìngqù)

OK, I'll take it.
我要买这个。(wǒ yào mǎi zhège)

Please provide me with a carrier-bag.
请给我袋子。(qǐng gěi wǒ dàizi)

Do you ship (overseas)?
可以邮寄到海外吗?(kěyǐ yóujiào dào hǎiwài ma?)

I need...
我要_____(wǒ yào _____)

...toothpaste.
牙膏(yágāo)

...a toothbrush.
牙刷(yáshuā)

...tampons.
卫生棉条(wèishēng miántiáo)

...soap.
肥皂(féizào)

...shampoo.
洗发精(xǐfàjīng)

...pain reliever. (e.g., aspirin or ibuprofen)
镇痛剂(zhèntòngjì)

...cold medicine.
感冒药(gǎnmào yào)

...stomach medicine.
胃肠药(wèicháng yào)

...a razor.
剃刀(tìdāo)

...an umbrella.
雨伞(yǔsǎn)

...sunblock lotion.
防晒油(fángshài yóu)

...a postcard.
明信片(míngxìnpiàn)

...postage stamps.
邮票(yóupiào)

...batteries.
电池(diànchí)

...writing paper.
纸(zhǐ)

...a pen.
笔(bǐ)

...a pencil.
铅笔(qiānbǐ)

...glasses.
眼镜(yǎnjìng)

...English-language books.
英文书(Yīngwén shū)

...English-language magazines.
英文杂志(Yīngwén zázhì)

...an English-language newspaper.
英文报纸(Yīngwén bàozhǐ)

...a Chinese-English dictionary.
汉英词典(Hàn-Yīng cídiǎn)

...an English-Chinese dictionary.
英汉词典(Yīng-Hàn cídiǎn)

Driving

I want to rent a car.
我想要租车。(wǒ xiǎngyào zūchē)

Can I get insurance?
我可以买保险吗?(wǒ kěyǐ mǎi bǎoxiǎn ma?)

stop (on a street sign)
停(tíng)

one way
单行道(dānxíngdào)

yield
让路(rànglù)

no parking
禁止停车(jìnzhǐ tíngchē)

speed limit
速度限制(sùdù xiànzhì)

gas (petrol) station
加油站(jiāyóuzhàn)

petrol
汽油(qìyóu)

diesel
柴油(cháiyóu)

Authority

I haven't done anything wrong.
我没有做错事。(wǒ méiyǒu zuòcuò shì)

It was a misunderstanding.
这是误会。(zhè shì wùhuì)

Where are you taking me?
你带我去哪里?(nǐ dài wǒ qù nǎlǐ?)

Am I under arrest?
我被捕了吗?(wǒ bèibǔle ma?)

I am an American/Australian/British/Canadian citizen.
我是美国/澳洲/英国/加拿大公民。(wǒ shì

měiguó/àozhōu/yīngguó/jiānádà gōngmín)

I want to talk to the American/Australian/British/Canadian
embassy/consulate.

我希望跟美国/澳洲/英国/加拿大的大使馆/领事馆联系。

(wǒ xīwàng gēn měiguó/àozhōu/yīngguó/jiānádà de dàshǐguǎn/lǐngshìguǎn liánxi)

I want to talk to a lawyer.
我希望跟律师联系。(wǒ xīwàng gēn lǜshī liánxi)

Can I just pay a fine now?
我可以支付罚款吗?(wǒ kěyǐ zhī fù fákuǎn ma?)

Telephone and the Internet

Telephone & Internet

In most Chinese cities, there are no telephone booths. Instead, small street shops have telephones which can usually be used for national calls. Look for signs like this: 公用电话 Public Telephone Most cafes are cheaper than in hotels. Many mid-range hotels and chains now offer free wireless or plug-in internet. Those cafes are quite hidden sometimes and you should look for the following Chinese characters:

网吧 Internet Cafe

Can I make international calls here?

可以打国际电话吗? (*kěyǐ dǎ guójì diànhuà ma?*)

How much is it to America/Australia/Britain/Canada?

打给 美国/澳洲/英国/加拿大 是多少钱? (*dǎgěi měiguó/àozhōu/yīngguó/jiānádà shì duōshǎo qián?*)

Where can I find an Internet cafe?

哪里有网吧? (*nǎlǐ yǒu wǎng ba?*)

How much is it per hour?

一小时是多少钱? (*yī xiǎoshí shì duōshǎo qián?*)

Learning more

Chinese is the most spoken language of the world, with more speakers than the next two, [Hindi](#) and [Spanish](#), combined. However, there are still few learners of Chinese in the Western world and you might get weird looks if you say you want to start learning it: "Instead of anger or frustration, the student should instead feel a smug superiority of being ahead of everyone else!"

The first step is to learn to read the romanization with tones. Avoid any phrasebook that does not mark the tones.

For simple sentences, one *may* be able to get away without tones, but this can cause confusion in more complex situations, so tones are **very** important. A classic example is the difference between the Chinese characters for "four" (四, sì) and "death" (死, sǐ), different only by tones.

A good idea for practicing is to make Chinese friends online since millions of young people in China also look for somebody to practice English with.