

Contents

The following Help Topics are available:

[Overview of Chinese](#)

[Nouns](#)

[Pronouns](#)

[Adjectives](#)


[Adverbs](#)

[Verbs](#)

[Conjunctions](#)

[Questions](#)

For Help on Help for Windows, press F1.

For Help on Help for Macintosh, select "Help with Quick Help" from the  menu .

Overview of Chinese

Today, about 50,000 Chinese characters exist, of which about 5,000 are commonly used. In 1958, the National People's Assembly approved the transliteration of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet. This system of transliteration is called pinyin. Mandarin, which is one of many dialects spoken in China, is introduced in this program. Mandarin is China's official language and is used broadly. Mandarin is spoken and taught in China, Hong Kong and many other places.

Pronunciation

Vowels

- a like a in far (but with no r-sound)
- e like e in mercury (but with no r-sound)
- i (1) like ee in cheese
(2) after c, s, z, ch, sh, zh, r, like e in mercury (with no r-sound)
- o like aw in paw
- u like oo in tool
- ü round your lips and try to say ee

Consonants

- c like ts in cats, followed by a strong puff of breath
- ch like ch in check, but with the tip of the tongue turned up and back to touch the roof of the mouth
- g as in give
- h like ch in the Scottish loch
- j like j in jeep
- q similar to ch in cheek
- r like r in rung with the tip of the tongue curled back
- s like s in sip
- sh like sh in shirt
- x like sh in sheep with lips widely spread
- y like y in yard
- z like ds in kids
- zh like j in judge

Nouns

Nouns do not change for number or case. Therefore, nouns remain the same whether they are singular or plural, and whether they are the subject or the object of a verb.

nín jiāo shén me **míng zì**?

(What is your name?)

wǒ de **míng zì** jiao Luo Lunsì.

(My name is Luo Lunsì.)

There are no definite articles. Definite or indefinite reference is usually determined by the positioning of the noun. When a noun comes before the verb, the noun has a definite reference, and when a noun comes after the verb, the noun has an indefinite reference.

shòu piào yuān shòu piào.

(The ticket seller is selling the tickets.)

Chinese nouns function essentially as subjects, objects or modifiers of other nouns. Basically, there are three groups.

1. Individual nouns

fáng jiān

(room)

zhī piào

(check)

2. Collective nouns

pí jiǔ

(beer)

fā lǎng

(French francs)

3. Abstract nouns

mandarin
(mandarin)

yì si
(What do you mean?)

Pronouns

Personal pronouns have the same form whether used as a subject or an object.

The following is a list of the Chinese personal pronouns.

wo

wō bù míng bāi

ni

nī hāo

ta

tā shì Lǐ Fèn Nī

women

wō men yǒu yī jiān hěn hǎo de dān rén fǎn
g

nimen

nī men shōu fèi shì duō shǎo

tamen

tā men jiāng yīng yǔ ma

The following is a list of the possessive forms of Chinese personal pronouns.

wode my/mine

wō de péng you my friend

nide your/yours

nī de biāo màn la Your watch is slow.

ninde your/yours (polite form)

wǒ dǒng **nín de** yí si I understand your meaning.

tade his/her/its

tā de péng you his friend

womende our/ours

wō men de fǎng jiān our room

zanmende our/ours

zān men de fǎng jiān our room

nimende your/yours

nī men de zì dōng chū nà jì Where is your ATM?

tamende their/theirs

tā men de jǐ piào their tickets

The plural suffix **-men** is used with pronouns.

wō men

(we)

nī men

(you)

tā men

(they)

Interrogative pronouns

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Interrogative pronouns indicate that the sentence in which it occurs is a question. Pronouns such as "**shuí**" (who), "**shén me**" (what) and "**nā**" (which one) belong to this category.

shuí huì jiǎng yīng yǔ?

(Who can speak English?)

shén me shì hòu jiāng lù.

(When will the plane land.)

Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are determinative words and point out a certain group of nouns, such as **zhè**, (this) **nà** (that) **měi** (every), and **gè** (each).

zhè shì lǐ fēng ní This is Li Feng Ni.

nà shì dùn là yú That is spicy fish.

mei rén everybody

mei gè shū each book

Adjectives

Adjectives are placed before the nouns that they qualify.

nín yāo **kāi wēi** jiǔ ma
(Do you want some wine?)

Adjectives are usually preceded by the adverb **hěn** (very) in its positive form.

wǒ men yǒu yī jiān **hěn** hǎo de dān rēn fáng
(We have a very good single room.)

A degree adverb does not have to be used when **bu** (not) is used in the sentence.

wǒ **bù** jiǎng yīng yǔ
(I don't speak English.)

When used predictively, the verb **shi** (to be) can be dropped.

wǒ hěn hǎo [**shi** is omitted after **wǒ**]
(I am very fine.)

Adverbs

These adverbs are followed by verbs:

Jiu (then)

wǒ **jiù** yào zhè ge fáng jiān ba
(I want this room.)

Dou (all, both)

lǚ xīng zhī piào **dōu** zài lǐ mian
(My travelers checks are all in my purse.)

Zhi (only)

wǒ **zhī** jiǎng yī diǎn zhōng wén
(I can only speak a little Chinese.)

Ye (also)

nǐn **yě** kě yì jiǎng zhōng wén ma
(Can you also speak Chinese?)

Zai, you (again)

zài xiè xie nǐn
(Thank you again.)

Dan, que (but)

dàn wǒ kě yǐ gěi nǐn zòu liǎng biān de zǐ wèi
(But I can give you an aisle seat.)

Verbs

Chinese verbs have no differences between the singular and plural forms at all.

In Chinese, verbs can be divided into three groups: **shi** (to be), **you** (to have), and other general verbs.

Shi describes or defines the subject.

wǒ **shì** gāo shān
(I am Gao shan.)

You indicates possession or existence.

wǒ men **yǒu** yī jiān hěn hǎo de dān rén fáng.
(We have a very nice single room.)

To make a sentence negative, place **mei** before **you**.

wǒ **méi** yǒu xū yào bào Guān de dōng xì
(I do not have anything to declare.)

Instead of conjugation, Chinese verbs use a suffix to show tense.

The suffix **-le** is placed after the verb to show that the action has been completed.

wǒ diū **le** qiān bāo
(I lost my purse.)

The suffix **-guo** after a verb indicates the indefinite past. That is, whether something has or has not happened but without a specific notion or point in time.

wǒ qù **guo** nán jīng lù
(I have been to nan jing road.)

Zai comes before the verb and indicates an action in progress.

wǒ **zāi** zhǎo nán jīng lù
(I am looking for nan jing road.)

Conjunctions

Nouns can be joined together by the conjunctions **he** (and) or **huo** (or).

wǒ de qūnzi **hě** wǒ xiān shēng de xī fù

(my skirt and my husband's suit)

Questions

shei(or **shui**) who or whom

shuì huì jiǎng yīng yǔ
(Who can speak English?)

sheide (or shuide) whose

shuí de hù zhāo
(Who's passport is this?)

shenme what

nà shì **shén me**
(What is this?)

shenme shihou (or **jǐ she**) when

diàn yǐng **shén me shí hou** kāi shǐ
(When will the movie start?)

jǐ diān (zhong) what time

xiàn zài shì **jǐ diān**
(What time is it now?)

nǎr (or **shenme difang**) where

nín yào dào **shén me dì fāng** qù
(Where are you going?)

zenme, zen (me) yang how

zěn me zuò de ne
(How was it made?)

na/nei + (numeral) + measure word which

nā liǎng gè zuò wēi
(Those two seats.)

wei shenme why

tā **wèi shén me** bù lái
(Why didn't he come?)

To form a general question in Chinese, place **ma** at the end of the sentence.

nín huì jiǎng yīng yǔ **ma**.
(Can you speak English?)

