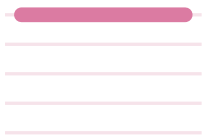
# Pinyin and tones 拼音和声调



**Pinyin** is Mandarin written in Latin letters. It tells you how to say a character. The mark over the vowel is the tone: the shape your voice makes. Change the tone, and you change the word.

## Same syllable, five words

### 1



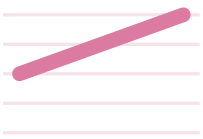
**mā**

妈

mother

**High and flat.** Hold one high note, like singing.

### 2



**má**

麻

hemp; numb

**Rising.** Goes up, like a surprised **what?**

### 3



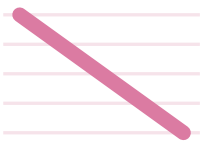
**mǎ**

马

horse

**Low, dipping.** Goes down, then up. In fast speech it often just stays low.

### 4



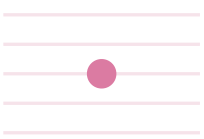
**mà**

骂

to scold

**Falling.** Drops hard, like a firm **No!**

### NEUTRAL



**ma**

吗

question word

**Light.** Short and soft, no mark. 吗 turns a sentence into a yes or no question.

## 妈妈骂马吗?

**Māma mà mǎ ma?**

Is mum scolding the horse? All four tones and the light one in one line.

## Every syllable has three parts

**h** initial — the start

\+

**ao** final — the rest

\+

ˇ tone 3rd

=

**hǎo** 好 good

## One tone apart, a different word

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 买 **mǎi** to buy | or | 卖 **mài** to sell | 汤 **tāng** soup | or | 糖 **táng** sugar | 问 **wèn** to ask | or | 吻 **wěn** to kiss | 水饺 **shuǐjiǎo** dumplings | or | 睡觉 **shuìjiào** to sleep |

**The marks draw the pitch:** ¯ stays high, ´ goes up, ˇ dips, ` falls. Some books write numbers instead: ma1 ma2 ma3 ma4, and ma or ma5 for the light one.

**How:** say mā má mǎ mà out loud, slowly, with your hand drawing the shape in the air. Then do it with any syllable from the next pages. In Kitsumi, hover any word in Chinese subtitles to see what it means, then say it back.

# Initials 声母



**21 starting sounds.** Most are close to English. The **orange** ones are the tricky ones: they look English, but they're not.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Lips** | **b**<br>b in **boy**, soft, no puff of air<br>八 bā eight | **p**<br>p in **pie**, with a puff<br>朋友 péngyou friend | **m**<br>m in **me**<br>猫 māo cat | **f**<br>f in **fun**<br>饭 fàn meal, rice |
| **Tongue tip** | **d**<br>d in **do**, soft, no puff<br>大 dà big | **t**<br>t in **top**, with a puff<br>他 tā he | **n**<br>n in **no**<br>你 nǐ you | **l**<br>l in **low**<br>来 lái to come |
| **Back of the mouth** | **g**<br>g in **go**, soft, no puff<br>狗 gǒu dog | **k**<br>k in **kite**, with a puff<br>看 kàn to look, watch | **h**<br>h, rougher, like ch in Scottish **loch**<br>好 hǎo good | |
| **Tongue flat, lips in a smile** | **j**<br>j in **jeep**, tongue flat behind the bottom teeth<br>家 jiā home, family | **q**<br>ch in **cheap**, with a puff. Never a k sound<br>去 qù to go | **x**<br>between s and sh: sh in **sheep** with a smile<br>小 xiǎo small | |
| **Tongue curled back** | **zh**<br>j in **jam**, tongue tip curled up<br>中 zhōng middle | **ch**<br>ch in **church**, tongue curled, with a puff<br>茶 chá tea | **sh**<br>sh in **shirt**, tongue curled<br>是 shì to be | **r**<br>between r in **run** and s in **measure**<br>热 rè hot |
| **Tongue on the teeth** | **z**<br>ds in **kids**<br>在 zài at, in | **c**<br>ts in **cats**, with a puff. Never a k sound<br>菜 cài dish, vegetable | **s**<br>s in **sun**<br>三 sān three | |

**Puff or no puff:** b d g j zh z are soft, with no puff of air. p t k q ch c come with a puff. Hold a sheet of paper in front of your mouth: it moves for p, and stays still for b.

**Curled or flat:** for zh ch sh r, curl the tip of your tongue up toward the roof of your mouth. For j q x, keep it flat and smile. j q x only ever come before i or ü.

**The buzzy i:** after zh ch sh r z c s, the i is not ee. It's a buzz that carries on from the consonant: 是 shì sounds like shr, 四 sì like a long sss, 吃 chī like chr.

# Finals 韵母



## Single vowels

**a** — a in father
爸爸 bàba dad

**o** — aw in law, lips round
摸 mō to touch

**e** — u in duh, from the back of the throat
饿 è hungry

**i** — ee in see
米 mǐ rice (raw)

**u** — oo in food
不 bù not

**ü** — say ee with round lips, like German ü
女 nǚ woman

**er** — ar in American car
二 èr two

## Two vowels

**ai** — eye
爱 ài love

**ei** — ay in say
美 měi beautiful

**ao** — ow in cow
高 gāo tall

**ou** — oh, as in go
走 zǒu to walk

## Ending in n or ng

**an** — ahn
看 kàn to look

**en** — un in taken
门 mén door

**ang** — ahng
忙 máng busy

**eng** — ung in lung
冷 lěng cold

**ong** — oong, round lips
红 hóng red

## Starting with i

**ia** — ya in yard
下 xià down

**ie** — ye in yes
谢谢 xièxie thank you

**iao** — yow, like miaow
叫 jiào to be called

**iu** — yo in yoga
六 liù six

**ian** — yen, not yan
天 tiān sky, day

**in** — een in seen
心 xīn heart

**iang** — yahng
想 xiǎng to want, think

**ing** — ing in sing
听 tīng to listen

**iong** — yoong
熊 xióng bear

## Starting with u

**ua** — wah
花 huā flower

**uo** — wo in wonder, round
多 duō many

**uai** — why
快 kuài fast

**ui** — way
对 duì correct

**uan** — wahn
关 guān to close

**un** — wun, short
春 chūn spring

**uang** — wahng
黄 huáng yellow

## Starting with ü

**üe** — ü + e in yet
学 xué to study

**üan** — ü + en
远 yuǎn far

**ün** — ü + n
云 yún cloud

## Four spelling rules

**1. ü drops its dots after j q x y.** ju, qu, xu, yu, xué, yuǎn are all ü. j q x never go with a plain u, so the dots aren't needed. After n and l the dots stay, since both exist: 女 nǚ woman, 怒 nù angry.

**2. Three short forms.** iou is written iu (六 liù), uei is ui (对 duì), uen is un (春 chūn). With no initial in front, the long form comes back: 有 yǒu, 为 wèi, 问 wèn.

**3. y and w at the start.** with no initial, i becomes y and u becomes w: ia ya, ie ye, ua wa, uo wo. When i or u is the whole vowel, they get a y or w in front: yi, yin, ying, wu. ü becomes yu: yue, yuan, yun.

**4. The apostrophe.** it marks where a new syllable starts with a, o or e: 西安 Xī'ān, the city, two syllables. Without it, xiān is one syllable, 先 first.

# Tone changes 变调



## Two 3rd tones in a row

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 你好 | nǐ hǎo | say **ní hǎo** | hello |
| 很好 | hěn hǎo | say **hén hǎo** | very good |
| 可以 | kěyǐ | say **kéyǐ** | can, OK |

**The first one rises:** it's said as a 2nd tone, but still written as a 3rd. A 3rd tone before any other tone just stays low.

## 不 bù before a 4th tone

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 不是 | bù shì | say **bú shì** | is not |
| 不要 | bù yào | say **bú yào** | don't want |
| 不好 | bù hǎo | no change | not good |
| 不来 | bù lái | no change | not coming |

**Becomes bú:** only before a 4th tone. In the middle of a phrase it goes light: 对不起 duìbuqǐ.

## 一 yī changes with the next tone

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 一 | yī | no change | one (alone, counting) |
| 十一 | shíyī | no change | eleven (at the end) |
| 一个 | yī gè | say **yí gè** | one (thing), before a 4th tone |
| 一天 | yī tiān | say **yì tiān** | one day, before a 1st tone |
| 一年 | yī nián | say **yì nián** | one year, before a 2nd |
| 一起 | yīqǐ | say **yìqǐ** | together, before a 3rd |

## Where the tone mark goes

**The rule:** put it on **a** or **e** if there is one. In **ou**, it goes on the o. Otherwise, on the last vowel.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **māo** | **xièxie** | **gǒu** | **liù** | **duì** | **nǚ** |
| a comes first | no a, so e | o in ou | the last vowel | the last vowel | ü keeps its dots |

## Practice: read it, then check

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 你好<br>**nǐ hǎo**<br>hello · say ní hǎo | 谢谢<br>**xièxie**<br>thank you | 对不起<br>**duìbuqǐ**<br>sorry | 没关系<br>**méi guānxi**<br>it's OK, no problem | 我<br>**wǒ**<br>I, me | 你<br>**nǐ**<br>you | 是<br>**shì**<br>to be (am, is, are) |
| 不是<br>**bù shì**<br>is not; no · say bú shì | 中国<br>**Zhōngguó**<br>China | 再见<br>**zàijiàn**<br>goodbye | 朋友<br>**péngyou**<br>friend | 老师<br>**lǎoshī**<br>teacher | 什么<br>**shénme**<br>what | 喝水<br>**hē shuǐ**<br>to drink water |

1. 我是学生。
   **Wǒ shì xuésheng.**
   I'm a student.
2. 你叫什么名字?
   **Nǐ jiào shénme míngzi?**
   What's your name?
3. 我爱你。
   **Wǒ ài nǐ.**
   I love you.
4. 我不知道。
   **Wǒ bù zhīdào.**
   I don't know.
5. 多少钱?
   **Duōshao qián?**
   How much is it?
6. 妈妈骂马吗?
   **Māma mà mǎ ma?**
   Is mum scolding the horse?

**How:** cover the pinyin with a strip of paper. Say each word from the characters, then slide the paper to check.