MANDARIN CHINESE · GRADES K–8 · MANDARIN I · QUICK REFERENCE

MANDARIN (Pinyin · Characters · Patterns)

Grades K–12 | 4 pages

Pinyin and the four tones with their changes, strokes, stroke order and radicals, how characters are built, the core grammar patterns and question words, aspect with 了, 过 and 在, numbers counted by 万, measure words, time, dates and money, everyday words, and the verses, festivals and poems the course learns.

1 Pinyin & tones | 2 Characters | 3 Grammar patterns | 4 Numbers & time | 5 Everyday words | 6 Faith & poems

1 PINYIN & THE FOUR TONES

grades 3, 6, Mandarin I · the sound system

The tones on ma

Tone	Mark	Pitch	Example
1st	mā	high and level ¯	妈 mā mother
2nd	má	rising ´ (like a question)	麻 má hemp
3rd	mǎ	dip down, then up ˇ	马 mǎ horse
4th	mà	sharp fall ` (like a command)	骂 mà scold
neutral	ma	short, light	吗 ma (question)

The mark sits on the main vowel: **a** first, then **o** or **e**, then i / u / ü; in iu and ui on the second letter (jiǔ, guì).

Tone changes

- **3rd + 3rd → 2nd + 3rd:** nǐ hǎo is said ní hǎo; 很好 hěn hǎo → hén hǎo.
- **不 bù** becomes **bú** before a 4th tone: bú shì, bú yào.
- **一 yī** becomes **yí** before a 4th tone (yí gè) and **yì** before the others (yì tiān, yì běn).

Initials that trip English speakers

Pinyin	Says
zh, ch, sh, r	tongue curled back: zhōng, chī, shū, rén
z, c, s	z = ds in beds, c = ts in cats, s = s: zì, cài, sān
j, q, x	tongue tip down behind the lower teeth: jiā, qù, xiè (q ≈ ch, x ≈ sh, lighter)
b, d, g	unaspirated: no puff of air
p, t, k	aspirated: a puff of air
ü	say ee with round lips: nǚ, lǜ; after j, q, x written u: jù, qù, xué

Finals to watch

zi, ci, si, zhi, chi, shi, ri: the i is a buzz, not ee. **e** alone is "uh" (hē, de); **ie, üe** say eh (xiè, yuè). **ou** as in go; **ao** as in cow; **ei** as in day; **an** ≈ ahn; **ang** ≈ ahng; **ong** ≈ oong. Syllables starting with i, u, ü are written yi-, wu-, yu-: yī, wǔ, yú.

Finals

Group	Finals
simple	a o e i u ü
a-	ai ao an ang
e-	ei en eng er
o-	ou ong
i-	ia iao ie iu ian in iang ing iong
u-	ua uo uai ui uan un uang ueng
ü-	üe üan ün

MEMORY TRICK

Tones are part of the word

mǎi 买 is **buy**, mài 卖 is **sell**. Wǒ xiǎng wèn nǐ = I want to ask you; wěn = kiss. Say the tone every time, from day one.

2 CHARACTERS: STROKES, RADICALS & HOW THEY ARE BUILT

grades 3, 5, 6, Mandarin I

The basic strokes

Stroke	Name	Looks like
丶	diǎn 点	dot
一	héng 横	horizontal
丨	shù 竖	vertical
丿	piě 撇	falling left
乀	nà 捺	falling right
㇀	tí 提	rising
乛	zhé 折	bend
亅	gōu 钩	hook

Stroke order rules

- Top to bottom (三), left to right (川).
- Horizontal before vertical (十); left falling before right falling (人).
- Outside before inside, close the box last (国, 回).
- Middle before the two sides when they are symmetrical (小).
- Count strokes to look a character up: 人 2, 口 3, 水 4, 我 7.

Common radicals (部首 bùshǒu): the hint of meaning

Radical	Means	Seen in
人 亻	person	你 他 们
口	mouth	吃 喝 叫 吗
女	woman	妈 姐 好 她
子	child	字 学 孩
木	tree, wood	林 森 树 桌
水 氵	water	河 海 洗 汽
火 灬	fire	烧 热 点
土	earth	地 坐 在
日	sun, day	明 早 晚 时
月	moon, flesh	朋 服 脚
心 忄	heart	想 忘 快 怕
言 讠	speech	说 话 谢 请
手 扌	hand	打 拿 找
艹	grass	花 茶 菜
金 钅	metal	钱 铁
辶	walking	这 远 近 道
门	gate	问 间 闻
宀	roof	家 安 室

How characters are built

- **Pictures** (象形 xiàngxíng): 人 person, 口 mouth, 大 big, 小 small, 山 mountain, 水 water, 日 sun, 月 moon, 木 tree, 火 fire, 马 horse, 鱼 fish.
- **Pictures combined** (会意): 木 + 木 = 林 woods; 木木木 = 森 forest; 日 + 月 = 明 bright; 女 + 子 = 好 good; 人 + 木 = 休 rest.
- **Meaning + sound** (形声 xíngshēng), most characters: 妈 mā = 女 (meaning) + 马 mǎ (sound); 河 hé = 氵 + 可 kě; 请 qǐng = 讠 + 青 qīng.
- **Simplified** (mainland, this course) vs **traditional** (Taiwan, Hong Kong): 国 / 國, 学 / 學, 爱 / 愛.

From oracle bones to the keyboard

甲骨文 jiǎgǔwén, the oldest writing on shells and bones (about 1200 B.C.) → bronze and seal script → the brush and 书法 shūfǎ calligraphy → 拼音 pīnyīn (1958) → typing: write the pinyin, pick the character. A Chinese dictionary is searched by radical and stroke count.

3 GRAMMAR PATTERNS

no endings, no tenses: word order and little words do the work

Core patterns

Pattern	Example	Meaning
Subject + Verb + Object	我吃苹果。	I eat apples.
A 是 B	他是老师。	He is a teacher.
不 + verb / adjective	我不是学生。我不喜欢。	I am not a student. I don't like it.
Time before the verb	我七点起床。	I get up at seven.
Place: 在 + place + verb	我在家学习。	I study at home.
很 + adjective	她很高。	She is tall. (很 is nearly silent)
有 / 没有	我有一个哥哥。我没有狗。	I have an older brother. I don't have a dog.
的 = 's / of	我的书 · 妈妈的车	my book · Mom's car
太 … 了	太贵了!	Too expensive!
因为 … 所以	因为下雨，所以我不去。	Because it is raining, I'm not going.
虽然 … 但是	虽然很难，但是很有意思。	Although it is hard, it is interesting.

Questions

Pattern	Example
… 吗?	你是美国人吗? Are you American?
… 呢?	我很好，你呢? I'm fine, and you?
verb 不 verb	你去不去? Are you going?
什么 what	这是什么? What is this?
谁 who	他是谁? Who is he?
哪儿 where	你去哪儿? Where are you going?
哪 which	你是哪国人? Which country are you from?
几 / 多少 how many	你几岁? 多少钱? How old? How much money?
怎么 how	你怎么去? How do you go?
为什么 why	你为什么不来?
什么时候 when	你什么时候来?

Mood particles

吧 ba suggests: 我们走吧! Let's go! **啊 a** adds feeling: 好啊! **呢 ne** bounces a question back or marks "-ing": 他在吃饭呢. Also: **先 … 再** first … then; **从 … 到** from … to; **A 离 B 近** A is near B.

Verbs and aspect

Word	Use	Example
了 le	completed, or a change	我吃了。我好了。I ate. I'm better now.
没 méi	did not (past)	我没去。I didn't go.
过 guo	ever / have the experience	你去过中国吗? Have you been to China?
在 zài	right now (-ing)	我在看书。I am reading.
会 huì	can (learned skill); will	我会游泳。我会去。
能 néng · 可以 kěyǐ	can (able) · may (permission)	你能来吗? 我可以进来吗?
想 xiǎng	would like to, think	我想吃饺子。
要 yào	want, going to	我要水。我要去。
比 bǐ · 一样	than · the same as	冬天比夏天冷。我和你一样高。
最 zuì	the most	我最喜欢数学。

MEMORY TRICK

No conjugation, no plural, no tense

吃 chī is eat, eats, ate, eating. Time words (昨天, 明天), 了, 过 and 在 tell when. Nouns don't change for plural; 们 marks people: 我们, 你们, 他们.

4 NUMBERS, MEASURE WORDS, TIME & MONEY

grades K–7, Mandarin I

Numbers

#	字	pinyin	#	字	pinyin
0	零	líng	10	十	shí
1	一	yī	11	十一	shí yī
2	二 / 两	èr / liǎng	20	二十	èr shí
3	三	sān	21	二十一	èr shí yī
4	四	sì	99	九十九	jiǔ shí jiǔ
5	五	wǔ	100	一百	yì bǎi
6	六	liù	1,000	一千	yì qiān
7	七	qī	10,000	一万	yí wàn
8	八	bā	100,000,000	一亿	yí yì
9	九	jiǔ			

Count big numbers by **万** (ten thousand): 50,000 = 五万; a million = 一百万. Use **两 liǎng** for "two of": 两个人, 两本书; 二 for counting and in 十二.

Money

多少钱? How much? 块 kuài (dollar/yuan, written 元), 毛 máo (dime, written 角), 分 fēn (cent). 三块五 = 3.50. 太贵了! Too expensive. 便宜一点儿 a little cheaper. 一共 altogether.

Measure words (number + measure + noun)

Measure	For	Example
个 gè	people, most things	三个人, 一个苹果
本 běn	books	两本书
只 zhī	animals	一只猫, 两只狗
张 zhāng	flat things	一张纸, 一张桌子
条 tiáo	long thin things	一条鱼, 一条裤子
把 bǎ	things with handles	一把椅子, 一把伞
件 jiàn	clothes, matters	一件衣服
口 kǒu	family members	我家有五口人
杯 / 碗	cups / bowls	一杯茶, 一碗米饭
辆 liàng	vehicles	一辆车
位 wèi	people (polite)	一位老师
双 shuāng	pairs	一双鞋
岁 suì	years of age	我八岁
次 cì	times	一次, 两次

MEMORY TRICK **When in doubt, 个**

个 gè fits almost anything. 这个 this one, 那个 that one, 哪个 which one, 几个 how many.

Time: 几点了?

- 点 diǎn o'clock · 分 fēn minute · 半 bàn half · 刻 kè quarter: 两点 2:00, 两点半 2:30, 两点一刻 2:15, 两点三刻 2:45, 两点十分 2:10.
- 现在几点? What time is it now? 现在三点。
- 早上 morning · 上午 before noon · 中午 noon · 下午 afternoon · 晚上 evening · 今天, 明天, 昨天 today, tomorrow, yesterday · 每天 every day · 然后 then.

Days, months, dates

Chinese	English
星期一 … 星期六, 星期天 / 星期日	Monday … Saturday, Sunday
今天星期几? 今天星期三。	What day is today? Wednesday.
一月, 二月 … 十二月	January, February … December
几月几号? 五月三号。	What date? May 3.
二〇二六年	the year 2026
你今年多大? 我十岁。	How old are you this year? I am ten.
生日快乐!	Happy birthday!
春天 夏天 秋天 冬天	spring, summer, fall, winter

5 WORDS FOR EVERY DAY

grades K–5

Greetings and manners

Chinese	Pinyin	English
你好 / 您好	nǐ hǎo / nín hǎo	hello (polite: nín)
早上好 · 晚安	zǎoshang hǎo · wǎn'ān	good morning · good night
再见	zàijiàn	goodbye
谢谢 · 不客气	xièxie · bú kèqi	thank you · you're welcome
对不起 · 没关系	duìbuqǐ · méi guānxi	sorry · it's all right
请	qǐng	please; 请坐 please sit, 请问 may I ask
你好吗? 我很好。	nǐ hǎo ma? wǒ hěn hǎo	How are you? I'm fine.
你叫什么名字? 我叫…	nǐ jiào shénme míngzi? wǒ jiào…	What is your name? I am called…
认识你很高兴	rènshi nǐ hěn gāoxìng	glad to meet you
我是美国人	wǒ shì Měiguó rén	I am American

家 family

Chinese	English
爸爸 妈妈	dad, mom
哥哥 弟弟 姐姐 妹妹	older brother, younger brother, older sister, younger sister
爷爷 奶奶	grandpa, grandma
我家有五口人。	There are five people in my family.
我爱你	I love you

Body, colors, clothes

Chinese	English
头 眼睛 耳朵 鼻子 嘴 手 脚	head, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hand, foot
我头疼。我生病了。	My head hurts. I am sick.
红 黄 蓝 绿 白 黑 橙	red, yellow, blue, green, white, black, orange
衣服 裤子 鞋 帽子 · 穿	clothes, pants, shoes, hat · wear
红帽子	a red hat

Food

Chinese	English
米饭 面条 饺子 苹果 香蕉 水 茶	rice, noodles, dumplings, apple, banana, water, tea
我要… 我想吃… 我喜欢吃…	I want… I'd like to eat… I like to eat…
好吃! 我饿了。	Delicious! I'm hungry.
筷子 · 勺子 · 碗	chopsticks · spoon · bowl
吃饭了! 请慢用。	Dinner is ready! Enjoy your meal.

Animals

Chinese	English
猫 狗 鱼 鸟 马 牛 羊	cat, dog, fish, bird, horse, cow, sheep
熊猫 老虎 猴子 大象	panda, tiger, monkey, elephant

School, home, town

Chinese	English
书 笔 纸 桌子 椅子 · 这是书	book, pen, paper, desk, chair · this is a book
请坐 · 请听 · 请说	please sit · listen · speak
学校 教堂 家 商店 医院 银行 图书馆	school, church, home, shop, hospital, bank, library
我去教堂。	I go to church.
左边 右边 前面 后面 · 往前走	left, right, front, back · go straight ahead
坐车 火车 飞机 船 地铁 高铁 · 骑自行车	ride in a car, train, plane, boat, subway, high-speed rail · ride a bike
你怎么去? 我坐公共汽车去。	How do you go? By bus.

Weather and nature

Chinese	English
天气怎么样? 今天很热 / 很冷。	How is the weather? Hot / cold today.
下雨了 · 下雪了 · 刮风 · 晴天	it's raining · snowing · windy · sunny
太阳 月亮 星星 · 花 树 山 水	sun, moon, stars · flower, tree, mountain, water

Hobbies: 我会…

Chinese	English
唱歌 游泳 踢足球 打篮球 跑步 画画	sing, swim, play soccer, play basketball, run, draw
你会游泳吗? 我会。	Can you swim? I can.

6 FAITH, FESTIVALS & POEMS

grades 5–8, Mandarin I

Words of faith

Chinese	Pinyin	English
神 / 上帝	Shén / Shàngdì	God
耶稣基督	Yēsū Jīdū	Jesus Christ
圣经	Shèngjīng	the Bible (和合本 Héhéběn, 1919)
教会	jiàohuì	church
祷告 · 阿们	dǎogào · āmen	pray · amen
福音 · 信	fúyīn · xìn	gospel · believe
圣诞节快乐!	Shèngdànjié kuàilè	Merry Christmas!
复活节快乐!	Fùhuójié kuàilè	Happy Easter!

Verses

- **约翰福音 3:16** 神爱世人，甚至将他的独生子赐给他们，叫一切信他的，不至灭亡，反得永生。
- **约翰福音 1:1** 太初有道，道与神同在，道就是神。
- **诗篇 23:1** 耶和华是我的牧者，我必不致缺乏。
- **创世记 1:1** 起初，神创造天地。

Festivals

Festival	When	Marks
春节 Chūnjié Spring Festival	lunar New Year (Jan–Feb)	年夜饭 reunion dinner, 红包 red envelopes, 新年快乐! 过年好!
元宵节 Lantern Festival	15th day of the first month	lanterns, 汤圆 sweet rice balls
端午节 Dragon Boat	5th day of the 5th month	dragon boats, 粽子 rice dumplings
中秋节 Mid-Autumn	15th day of the 8th month	full moon, 月饼 mooncakes, family
圣诞节 Christmas	12月25日	耶稣降生 the birth of Jesus

People of the story

利玛窦 Matteo Ricci and **徐光启 Xu Guangqi**: a map and a friendship (1600s). **马礼逊 Robert Morrison** translated the Bible (1823). **戴德生 Hudson Taylor**, inland China (1853–1905). **李爱锐 Eric Liddell**, the Olympic runner who taught in China. The 景教碑 Nestorian stele (781) is the oldest record of the gospel in China.

靜夜思 Jìng Yè Sī · Li Bai

床前明月光，疑是地上霜。举头望明月，低头思故乡。

Before my bed the bright moonlight; I thought it frost upon the ground. I raise my head and see the moon; I bow my head and think of home.

春晓 Chūn Xiǎo · Meng Haoran

春眠不觉晓，处处闻啼鸟。夜来风雨声，花落知多少。

Spring sleep, unaware of dawn; everywhere the birds are singing. Last night the sound of wind and rain; how many blossoms fell?

成语 and proverbs

Chinese	Meaning
守株待兔	waiting by the stump for a rabbit: hoping luck repeats
画蛇添足	drawing legs on a snake: ruining by overdoing
井底之蛙	a frog at the bottom of a well: a narrow view
愚公移山	the foolish old man moves the mountain: persistence
一言既出，驷马难追	a word once spoken, four horses cannot catch
敬畏耶和华是智慧的开端	the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (箴言 9:10)