



Chinese Language Mandarin



Peace Corps / China



The script accompanies the following 15 audio tracks:

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Lesson 1 Introduction to Chinese Language

Mandarin is the official language of the People's Republic of China. It is the dialect spoken in the capital, Beijing. It is taught in all schools and is used for television and broadcast. Almost the entire population understands Mandarin. The language taught in Pre-Service Training (PST) for Peace Corps trainees is Mandarin.

Chinese is a language with a large number of words with the same pronunciation but different meanings; what distinguishes these 'homophones' is their 'tonal' quality – the raising and lowering of pitch on certain syllables. Mandarin has four tones – high, rising, falling-rising and falling, plus a fifth "neutral" tone. To illustrate, look at the word *ma*, which has four different meanings according to tone:

High	mā	'mother'
Rising	má	'hemp' or 'numb'
Falling-rising	mǎ	'horse'
Falling	mà	'to scold' or 'swear'

Writing System

Chinese is not a phonetic language and the characters do not bear any resemblance to actual pronunciation. Chinese is often referred to as a language of pictographs.

There are about 56,000 characters, but the vast majority of these are archaic. It is commonly felt that a well-educated, contemporary Chinese might know and use between 6,000 and 8,000 characters. To read a Chinese newspaper you need to know 2,000 to 3,000, but 1,200 to 1,500 would be enough to get the gist.

Each Chinese character represents a spoken syllable, so many people declare that Chinese is a monosyllabic language. Actually, it's more a case of having a monosyllabic writing system. While the building block of the Chinese language is indeed the monosyllabic Chinese character, Chinese words are usually a combination of two or more characters. You could think of Chinese words as being compounds.

Phonetic system – Pinyin

In 1958 China adopted a system of writing their language using the Roman alphabet. It's known as Pinyin. It is used in this course.

Grammar

Chinese grammar is much simpler than that of European languages. There are no articles (a/an/the), no tenses, and no plurals. The basic point to bear in mind is that, like English, Chinese word order is subject-verb-object. In other words, a basic English sentence like "I (subject) love (verb) you (object)" is constructed in exactly the same way in Chinese.



Lesson 2 Phonetics

There are 6 basic vowels and 21 consonants in Mandarin Chinese. A syllable always consists of a vowel (V) or a consonant with a vowel (CV), such as ba, fo, ne. Consonant clusters, two or more consonants used in succession, are not permitted in Chinese. Syllabic combinations common in English such as VC (up, at), CVC (big, pat, map), CCVC (bred, dread, stone), CVCC (mask, best, sand), CCV (fly, blue, grow) CCCV (screw, spray, stray), VCC (old, and, ink), VCCC (Olds, ants, amps), CCVCC (brand, trains, swings), CVCCC (tests, tenths, lunged), CVCCCC (thirsts, texts, worlds), CCVCCC (slurps, prints, flirts), CCCVC (street, squat, strut), CCCVCC (struts, squats, sprained), and CCCVCCC (scrimps, sprints, squelched) are not possible in Chinese. CVC, on the other hand, is possible in Chinese, but the final C can only be the nasal sounds -n and -ng and the retroflex -r, such as jing, nan, yong and er. Consonants are often called initials because they invariably appear initially in a word with the exception of the final -n, -ng or r, which can appear finally. Vowels are also called finals because they appear medially or finally in a word. Vowels can stand by themselves when no initial consonant is present.

Let's learn the finals (vowels) first:

MANDARIN	SIMILAR ENGLISH SOUND	EXAMPLE (PINYIN & CHARACTER)	NOTE
a	Father	bà 爸	
e	fur	cè 测	
i	see	dì 地	
o	or	pó 婆	
u	flute	bù 不	
ü	German 'für'	Lù 绿	Written as 'u' when appearing after 'j q x'
ai	fly	nǎi 奶	
ao	now	hǎo 好	
ei	day	měi 美	
ia	yard	xià 下	
ie	yes	xiè 谢	
iu	yolk	liù 六	
ou	low	lóu 楼	
ua	wah	huā 花	
`e	you ate	yuè 月	'e' stands for a syllable by itself, so it is written as 'yue', with the 2 dots dropped
ui	way	huì 会	
uo	war	zuò 做	
iao	miaow	yào 要	
uai	why	kuài 快	
an	upon	màn 慢	
en	broken	wèn 问	
ang	town	fáng 房	
eng	ehng	pèng 碰	
er	her	èr 二	
ian	yen	diǎn 点	
iang	yahng	liáng xié 凉	
in	inn	xīn 心	



ing	eeng	tīng 听	
iong	yohng	yòng 用	
ong	song	dōng 冬	
uan	wand	guān 关	
un	when	hūn 昏	
uang	wong	huáng 黄	
`an	you an	quán 全	
`n	yuen	jūn 军	

Now the initials (consonants):

MANDARIN	SIMILAR ENGLISH SOUND	EXAMPLE (PINYIN & CHARACTER)	NOTE
Bb	boy	bà 爸	
Pp	paper	pó 婆	
Mm	mother	mā 妈	
Ff	food	fā 发	
Dd	door	dà 大	
Tt	tall	tā 他	
Nn	name	nǐ 你	
Ll	life	lè 乐	
Gg	girl	gè 个	
Kk	kid	kè 客	
Hh	high	hé 和	
Jj	jeans	jiě 姐	the lips do not protrude
Qq	cheese	qián 钱	
Xx	shock	xiū 休	the lips do not protrude
Zz	kids	zuò 坐	
Cc	cats	cā 擦	Not an equivalent in English
Ss	sir	sān 三	
Zhzh	joy	zhǎo 找	pronounced without rounding and protruding the lips
Chch	child	chuáng 床	See above
Shsh	shoe	shuō 说	See above
Rr	red	ruǎn 软	See above
Vv	visit		Only to spell foreign words
Ww	white	wǒ 我	Is actually 'u' when 'u' stands for a syllable by itself
Yy	year	yǒu 有	Is actually 'i' (see above)

Some sounds are especially difficult for English speakers to remember, and have similar pronunciations. The sound *q*, for example, sounds a little like *ch*. Similar pairs are *x* and *sh*, and *j* and *zh*.

Please listen and repeat the following words:

zi ci si zhi chi shi ri ji qi xi



Tones

High	—	high, flat, continuous tone
Rising	´	rising tone similar to the intonation used in the question 'What?'
Falling-rising	ˇ	tone that falls then rises. You'll hear many Mandarin speakers 'swallow' the rising sound, only giving it a clear falling-rising pattern for emphasis.
Falling	`	falling tone, similar to the one used when yelling 'Darn!'

To help you get close, here's a brief try at tones, transcribed in English. Consider the syllable 'mmm' (a non-syllable in Mandarin). Then,

— The high level tone is what you might say in English if you were asked a question, and you had to think about it before answering. It's high, and it's a constant tone: "Mmm, sixteen, I think."

´ The rising tone is like a question: "Mmm? I didn't catch that."

ˇ The low level tone is what you might say in English to express doubt, or disbelief: "Mmm...I don't know about that."

` The falling tone is like an interjection: "Mmm! Well, I'll be!"



Listen and repeat:

first tone	second tone	third tone	fourth tone
ā	á	ǎ	à
mā	má	mǎ	mà
tāng	táng	tǎng	tàng
qīng	qíng	qǐng	qìng
yān	yán	yǎn	yàn
guō	guó	guǒ	guò

Choose the syllables you heard:

- | | | | |
|--------|---------|----------|---------|
| dìdiǎn | bāobiǎn | tōnghóng | dàodiǎn |
| dìtǎn | bǎopiàn | gòngtóng | dàotián |
| zàizuò | xīngqiú | cāntīng | cèsuǒ |
| cáicuò | jīyóu | kànxìn | jiécuò |
- | | | | | | | |
|------|------|-----|-------|-------|-----|------|
| jiān | xué | yuē | rì | céng | ròu | xuǎn |
| zhān | shuī | juē | zì | qíng | zǒu | juǎn |
| zhǔn | chén | yuè | jiāng | cāng | | |
| zhěn | chūn | yún | zhāng | shāng | | |



Lesson 3 Basic Grammar

Mandarin grammar is relatively straightforward. There are no verb conjugations, no plurals, no articles (a/an/the), and no gender or tenses. At an elementary level, sentence order is similar to that of English: subject-verb-object. For example, the sentence “I study Chinese” follows exactly the same word order in Mandarin:

I study Chinese. Wǒ xué hànyǔ. (lit: I study Chinese)

Let's learn a few words first:

This	zhè
that	nà
to be	shì
tea	chá
rice/meal	fàn
cup	bēizi
egg	jīdàn
question particle	mā
no	bù
what	shénme

Then you can talk about objects:

This is tea.	Zhè shì chá.
That is rice.	Nà shì fàn.
This is a cup.	Zhè shì bēizi.
That is an egg.	Nà shì jīdàn.

Note: ‘Shì’ is ‘to be’. It is generally followed by a noun which defines the subject/topic. It is not normally followed by an adjective on its own.

How to form a question?

A very simple way to form a question in Chinese is by putting a question particle “ma” at the end of a sentence that would otherwise be a plain statement. English counterparts of these questions are usually formed by syntactically more complicated “transformational” processes such as movement of the verb to the beginning of the sentence.

Is this tea?	Zhè shì chá ma?
Yes./ No.	Shì / Bú shì.
Is that rice?	Nà shì fàn ma?
Yes. /No.	Shì / Bú shì.
Is this a cup?	Zhè shì bēizi ma?
Yes./No.	Shì / Bú shì.
Is that an egg?	Nà shì jīdàn ma?
Yes. /No.	Shì / Bú shì.



Note: The word “bù” is the negative word. It precedes the verb to indicate that something does not happen. Here its tone changes from the fourth to the second because it is followed by a fourth tone. You will learn the rule in the future.

So how do you ask what something is?

‘什么 Shénme’ is the interrogative word “what.” The most important feature about Chinese interrogative pronouns is that, unlike English practice, which shifts all interrogative pronouns to the beginning of the question, Chinese keeps them in the position in the sentence where the answers would be expected.

What is this?	Zhè shì shénme?
This is tea.	Zhè shì chá。
What is that?	Nà shì shénme?
That is a cup.	Nà shì bēizi。



Lesson 4 Greetings

Vocabulary

you (singular)	nǐ
I, me	wǒ
good, all right	hǎo
good bye	zàijiàn
morning	zǎo
morning	zǎoshàng
afternoon	xiàwǔ
evening	wǎnshàng

Dialogue 1

Greetings in all circumstances	
A: How are you?	A: Nǐ hǎo。
B: How are you?	B: Nǐ hǎo。
A: Good bye.	A: Zàijiàn。
B: Good bye.	B: Zàijiàn。

Note: Nǐ hǎo. This is a common, slightly formal, greeting. Literally it would translate as “You are good,” or if conceived of as a question, “Are you fine?” However, it is not really a question. The response is usually simply *Nǐ hǎo* again. Other common greetings used among friends or acquaintances are:

Dialogue 2:

Greet people in the morning	
Good morning.	A: Zǎo. (or Zǎoshàng hǎo.)
Good morning.	B: Zǎo. (or Zǎoshàng hǎo.)

Note: You can change the morning, *zǎoshàng*, to afternoon, *xiàwǔ*, or evening, *wǎnshàng*, and add good, *hǎo*, to greet people in different times of a day.



Lesson 5: Introductions

Vocabulary

May I ask...?	Qǐngwèn...
you (singular)	nǐ
what	shénme
name	míngzi
I, me	wǒ
call, to be called, to be named	jiào
(V) to be surnamed; (N) surname	xìng
a male's name	Zhāng Wěi

Dialogue 1

Ask for the whole name	
A: May I ask your name?	A: Qǐngwèn, nǐ jiào shénme míngzi?
B: I'm called Zhang Wei.	B: Wǒ jiào Zhāng Wěi.

Dialogue 2:

Ask for the family name and the given name	
A: May I ask your surname?	A: Qǐngwèn, nǐ xìng shénme?
B: My family name is Wang. I'm called Wang Jiande. And you? What is your name?	B: Wǒ xìng Wáng, Wǒ jiào Wáng Jiàndé. Nǐ ne? Nǐ jiào shénme míngzi?
A: My family name is Zhang. I am called Zhang Wei.	A: Wǒ xìng Zhāng, jiào Zhāng Wěi.

Note: In a Chinese name, the surname or family name always comes first, followed by the given name. Most surnames consist of a single character, though some have two. Given names may be either one or two characters. Depending on social circumstances, individuals identify themselves either

- (1) by surname only: Wǒ xìng Zhāng
or
(2) by full name: Wǒ jiào Zhāng Wěi, or Wǒ shì Zhāng Wěi.

The personal pronouns:



I/me	wǒ
You	nǐ
He/him	tā
She/her	tā
It	tā
We/us	wǒmen
You (pl.)	nǐmen
They/them	tāmen

Note: Chinese personal pronouns are very simple. There is no distinction for case. *Wǒ* is *wǒ* regardless of whether it is the subject of the sentence or the object of the verb, and the same is true for the second and third person pronouns. Nor is there a distinction for gender. *Tā* is *tā*, whether it refers to a woman or a man.



Lesson 6 Numbers and Prices

Numbers 1–10:

one	yī	一
two	èr	二 (When counting, two is èr 二, when used with measure words, it is liǎng 两)
three	sān	三
four	sì	四
five	wǔ	五
six	liù	六
seven	qī	七
eight	bā	八
nine	jiǔ	九
ten	shí	十

Numbers 10–1billion:

The Chinese number system is quite simple and generally easy to learn. Multiples of 10 are made by stating the multiple and then 10—so 20 is literally “two ten.” If you learn the numbers from one to 10, you can count to 100 without having to learn any new vocabulary.

The Chinese counting system is based on units of 10. These multiply as follows:

10	shí	十
100	bǎi	百
1000	qiān	千
10,000	wàn	万
100,000	shíwàn	十万
1 million	bǎiwàn	百万
10 million	qiānwàn	千万
100 million	wànwàn; yì	亿
1 billion	shí yì	十亿

Ordinal numbers:

Simply prefix any number with dì, and it becomes an ordinal:

1st	dì yī
2nd	dì' èr
3rd	dì sān
10th	dì shí



Dialogue 1

Asking for the price	
Excuse me, how much is this?	A: Qǐng wèn, zhège duōshǎo qián?
Ten yuan.	B: Shí-kuài qián。
I want this one. Thanks.	A: Wǒ yào zhège。 Xièxiè。

Dialogue 2

Asking for items in the grocery	
What do you want to buy?	A: Nǐ yào mǎi shénme?
I want to buy mineral water. How much is it (per bottle)?	B: Wǒ yào mǎi kuàngquánshuǐ。 Duōshǎo qián yì-píng?
Two-sixty. How many bottles do you want?	A: Liǎng-kuài-liù。 Yào jǐ-píng?
Four.	B: Sì-píng。

Vocabulary

this	zhège	
that	nàge	
which	nǎge	
how much? how many?	duōshǎo	
money	qián	
"dollar" or Chinese yuan	kuài	(yuán is slightly more formal)
want	yào	
thanks, thank you	xièxiè	
buy	mǎi	
mineral water	kuàngquánshuǐ	
(Measure word) bottle	píng	
how many? (up to ten or so)	jǐ-	(another meaning is 'several')



Lesson 7 Food and Drinks

Vocabulary

rice	mǐfàn
noodle	miàntiáo
dumpling	jiǎozi
bread	miànbāo
vegetable	shūcài
pork	zhūròu
beef	niúròu
fish	yú
water	shuǐ
mineral water	kuàngquǎnshuǐ
coffee	kāfēi
tea	chá
milk	niúnnǎi.
juice	guǒ zhī.
beer	píjiǔ
yogurt	suānnǎi
bowl	wǎn
plate	pánzi
cup	bēizi
bottle	píngzi
sugar	táng
salt	yán
chili	làjiāo
oil	yóu
MSG	wèijīng
hot	rède; tàngde
iced	bīngdòngde
and	hé

Phrases & Sentences:

I'd like to have noodles.	Wǒ yào miàntiáo。
I don't want noodles.	Wǒ búyào miàntiáo。
Do you have... or not?	Yǒu méiyǒu...?
Don't make it too hot.	Búyào tài là。
I like dumplings.	Wǒ xǐhuān jiǎozi。
I don't like rice.	Wǒ bùxǐhuān mǐfàn。
Can I have the bill, please?	Mǎidān/Suànzhang。

Please try to use the vocabulary above to substitute these sentences.



Lesson 8 Some Chinese Dishes

Cold Dishes (Appetizers):

liángbàn jiāngdòu	Boiled cowpeas with chili sauce
pàocài	pickles

Hot Dishes (Main Course):

yúxiāng ròusī	Stir fried shredded pork with “YuXiang” sauce
huíguō ròu	Twice cooked pork
yúxiāng qiézi	Stir fried eggplant with “YuXiang” sauce
gōngbào jīdīng	Spicy chicken with peanuts
fānqié chǎo jīdàn	Scrambled eggs with tomato
tángcù páigǔ	Sweet and sour spare ribs

Vegetable:

hǔpí qīngjiāo	Fried/Tiger-skin green pepper
tǔdòu sī	Stir fried shredded potatoes
tángcù liánbái	Stir fried cabbage with sweet and sour sauce
gānbiǎn sījìdòu	Fried kidney beans

Noodles:

fānqié jīdàn miàn	Noodles with egg & tomato
zájiàng miàn	Noodles with meat sauce
niúròu miàn	Noodles with beef
hóngyóu shuǐjiǎo	Boiled dumplings with chili sauce
qīngtāng shuǐjiǎo	Boiled dumplings
chāoshǒu	Boiled soft dumplings with soup

Rice & Grains

mǐfàn	Rice
dàn chǎofàn	Fried rice with egg
bābǎo zhōu	8-treasures Porridge

Fruits:

píngguǒ	apples
xiāngjiāo	bananas
júzi	tangerines
xīguā	watermelon
táozi	peaches
lízi	pears
cǎoméi	strawberries

Please say “I like ...” and “I don’t like ...” in Chinese by using above vocabulary.

Please visit a Chinese restaurant in your hometown to try out some dishes and try your Chinese language!



Lesson 9 Useful Phrases

Thank you.	Xièxiè。
You're welcome	Búxiè。
I am sorry.	Duìbuqǐ。
That's all right	Méiguānxi。
May I ask...?	Qǐngwèn...
Do you speak English?	Nǐ huìshuō yīngyǔ ma?
I am an American.	Wǒ shì měiguó rén。
I am a Peace Corps volunteer.	Wǒ shì Héping duìyuán。
I don't speak Chinese.	Wǒ búhuì hànyǔ。
Do you understand?	Nǐ néng tīngdǒng ma?
I don't understand.	Wǒ tīng bùdǒng。
Please say it again.	Qǐng zài shuō yíbiàn。
Please speak slowly.	Qǐng shuō màn yìdiǎn。



Lesson 10 Sickness and Emergency

Sickness

I am sick.	Wǒ shēngbìng le。
I have a cold.	Wǒ gǎnmào le。
I am allergic to this.	Wǒ duì zhège guòmǐn。
I am tired.	Wǒ lèi le。
I want to go to bed.	Wǒ xiǎng shuìjiào le。
Where is the bathroom?	Xǐshǒujiān zài nǎ?
I need to go to the hospital.	Wǒ yào dào yīyuàn。
May I ask where the hospital is?	Qǐngwèn, yīyuàn zài nǎ?

Emergency

Help!	Jiù mìng!
Police!	Jǐngchá!
May I use your telephone?	Wǒ kěyǐ yòng nǐde diànhuà ma?
I need to call the police 110.	Wǒ yào dǎ yāo-yāo-líng。

(yāo is an alternate pronunciation for the number one, used because yī is easily confused with qī, especially on the telephone)



Lesson 11 Direction and Places

Direction

Where is the...?	...zài nǎr?
On the left	Zài zuǒ biān。
On the right	Zài yòu biān。
Straight-ahead	Qián biān。
Near by	Fù jìn。
Not far from here	Lí zhèr bù yuǎn。
Above	Shàng biān。
Behind	Hòu biān。

Places

shop	shāngdiàn
street	jiē(dào)
restaurant	fànguǎn
school	xuéxiào
classroom	jiàoshì
office	bàngōngshì
bus station	chēzhàn
railway station	huǒchēzhàn



Lesson 12 Clothes and Colors

Clothes	Yīfu
pants	kùzi
blouse	wàitào
shirt	chènshān
skirt	qúnzi
jacket	jiákè
shoes	xié
sandals	liángxié
slippers	tuōxié
Colors	yánsè
white	bái (sè)
black	hēi (sè)
red	hóng (sè)
yellow	huáng (sè)
blue	lán (sè)
green	lǜ (sè)
gray	huī (sè)
brown	zōng/hè (sè)



Lesson 13 Time

Vocabulary

Days of the week	Xīngqī
Monday	Xīngqī yī
Tuesday	Xīngqī èr
Wednesday	Xīngqī sān
Thursday	Xīngqī sì
Friday	Xīngqī wǔ
Saturday	Xīngqī liù
Sunday	Xīngqī tiān
Weekend	Zhōumò
Months	Yuè
January	yī yuè
February	èr yuè
March	sān yuè
April	sì yuè
May	wǔ yuè
June	liù yuè
July	qī yuè
August	bā yuè
September	jiǔ yuè
October	shí yuè
November	shí yī yuè
December	shí èr yuè
year	nián
month	yuè
day	rì/hào



hour	diǎn
minute	fēn
yesterday	zuótiān
today	jīntiān
tomorrow	míngtiān

Phrases & Sentences:

What time is it?	Jǐ diǎn le?
It is 9:10.	Jiǔ diǎn shí fēn。
What day is it?	Jīntiān xīngqī jǐ?
Today is Monday.	Jīntiān xīngqī yī。
What is the date of today?	Jīntiān jǐhào?
Today is May 1.	Jīntiān wúyuè yīhào。



Lesson 14 Family

mother	māma
father	bàba
older sister	jiějie
younger sister	mèimei
older brother	gēge
younger brother	dìdi
daughter	nǚ'er
son	érzi
grandmother	nǎinai
grandfather	yéye
niece	zhīnǚ
nephew	zhīzi
man	nánrén
woman	nǚrén
boy	nánhái'r
girl	nǚhái'r



Lesson 15 Home Items

glass / cup	bēizi
chopsticks	kuàizi
bowl	wǎn
plate	pánzi
spoon	tāngshí
fork	chāzi
knife	dāo
table	zhuōzi
chair	yǐzi
door	mén
window	chuāng
home	jiā
hotel	bīnguǎn
room	fángjiān
bathroom	wèishēng jiān/cèsuǒ
toilet	mǎtǒng
toilet paper	wèishēng zhǐ
soap	féizào
towel	máojīn
bed	chuáng
bed sheet	chuángdān
blanket	tǎnzi
pillow	zhěntou



Appendix

Measure words in Chinese:
(No Audio)

In Chinese, as in other languages, nouns may be differentiated into a number of categories. The largest category is the common nouns, which covers tangible, discrete entities, e.g. 大人 dàrén adult, 树 shù tree, etc. The other noun categories are a) proper nouns, e.g. 中国 zhōngguó China, 张伟 Zhāng Wěi (name of a person); b) material nouns (for non-discrete entities), e.g. 茶 chá tea; c) and abstract noun (for non-tangible entities), e.g. 文化 wénhuà culture, 经济 jīngjì economy. The Chinese common nouns, unlike English ones, make no distinction in form between singular and plural:

cup/cups	bēizi
a/one cup	yí gè bēizi
two cups	liǎng gè bēizi
egg/eggs	jīdàn
an/one egg	yí gè jīdàn
two eggs	liǎng gè jīdàn

Another important feature of the common noun in Chinese is that when it is used with a numeral, the numeral has to have a measure word between it and the noun. gè is by far the most common measure word and it can occur with a wide range of nouns.

one person	yí gè rén
two eggs	liǎng gè jīdàn
three cups	sān gè bēizi
four elder brothers	sì gè gēge
five plates	wǔ gè pánzi
six teachers	liù gè lǎoshī
seven watermelons	qī gè xīguā
eight balls	bā gè píqiú
nine kids	jiǔ gè háizi
ten cities	shí gè chéngshì

A considerable number of nouns or sets of nouns are linked with particular measure words. We will learn more about measure words in the future.