AN INTRODUCTION TO SPEAKING AND LISTENING FOR BEGINNERS

CORNELIUS C. KUBLER

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Basic Spoken Chinese
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A Note to the Learner
Welcome to the first volume of an unusual, and highly effective, two-volume course in spoken Chinese.

As a native English speaker, your working hard to learn Chinese is not enough: you have to work smart in order to learn this very different language efficiently. No matter why you’ve chosen to learn Chinese—for business, travel, cultural studies, or another goal—the Basic Chinese approach of two separate but integrated tracks will help you learn it most efficiently, and successfully.

There are no Chinese characters to be found here because you don’t need characters to learn to speak Chinese. In fact, learning the characters for everything you learn to say is an inefficient way to learn Chinese, one that significantly slows down your progress.

To help you learn to speak and understand Chinese as efficiently as possible, Basic Spoken Chinese gives you the Chinese language portions of this course not via characters, but instead through video and audio featuring native speakers (on the accompanying disc and audio files). And in the pages of this book, the Chinese is represented in Hanyu Pinyin, the official Chinese romanization system.

- Basic Spoken Chinese should be used in conjunction with the accompanying Basic Spoken Chinese Practice Essentials.
- If you wish to learn Chinese reading and writing, which is certainly to be recommended for most learners, you should—together with or after the spoken course—use the companion course Basic Written Chinese. It corresponds with Basic Spoken Chinese and systematically introduces the highest-frequency characters (simplified and traditional) and words in context in sentences and reading passages as well as in realia such as street signs, notes, and name cards.
- For instructors and those learners with prior knowledge of Chinese characters, a Basic Spoken Chinese Character Transcription is also available. It contains transcriptions into simplified and traditional characters of Basic Spoken Chinese. Please note that the character transcription is not intended, and should not be used, as the primary vehicle for beginning students to learn reading and writing.
- The Basic Chinese Instructor’s Guide contains detailed suggestions for using these materials as well as a large number of communicative exercises for use by instructors in class or by tutors during practice sessions.

Please note
《基础中文：听与说》为专门练习口语的教材，内附有两张光盘，因此全书内只列有汉语拼音和英文注释，不使用汉字。学习者宜与配套的《基础中文：听与说》练习册一起使用。

此套中文教材另编有《基础中文：读与写》及《基础中文：读与写》练习册，专供读写课使用。《基础中文：听与说》另配有汉字版，将《基础中文：听与说》中所有对话和补充生词的拼音版转为汉字，并分简繁体，供教师和已有汉字基础的学习者参考、使用。

此套教材亦包括一张光盘的《基础中文：教师手册》，指导教师如何使用此教材，且提供大量课堂练习，极为实用。

请注意
《基礎中文：聽與說》為專門練習口語的教材，內附有兩張光盤，因此全書內只列有漢語拼音和英文注釋，不使用漢字。學習者宜與配套的《基礎中文：聽與說》練習冊一起使用。

此套中文教材另編有《基礎中文：讀與寫》及《基礎中文：讀與寫》練習冊，專供讀寫課使用。《基礎中文：聽與說》另配有漢字版，將《基礎中文：聽與說》中所有對話和補充生詞的拼音版轉為漢字，並分簡繁體，供教師和已有漢字基礎的學習者參考、使用。

此套教材亦包括一張光盤的《基礎中文：教師手冊》，指導教師如何使用此教材，且提供大量課堂練習，極為實用。
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Orientation

About This Course

Basic Spoken Chinese and Basic Written Chinese constitute an introductory course in modern Chinese (Mandarin), the language with the largest number of native speakers in the world, which is the official language of mainland China and Taiwan and one of the official languages of Singapore. The focus of this course, which is designed for adult English-speaking learners, is on communicating in Chinese in practical, everyday situations. We have tried to keep in mind the needs of a wide range of users, from college and university students to business people and government personnel. With some adjustments in the rate of progress, high school students may also be able to use these materials to their advantage. By availing themselves of the detailed usage notes and making good use of the Practice Essentials book, the video, and the audio, it is even possible for motivated self-learners to work through these materials on their own, though it would be desirable for them to meet with a teacher or native speaker for an hour or two per week, if possible. Although users with specialized needs will, in the later stages of their study, require supplementary materials, we believe this course provides a solid general foundation or “base” (hence the title of the course) that all learners of Chinese need, on which they may build for future mastery.

The course is divided into spoken and written tracks, each with various types of ancillary materials. The following diagram will clarify the organization of the whole course:

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**Basic Spoken Chinese**

- Textbook
- Practice Essentials Workbook
- Video Software
- Audio CD
  - (Audio + Printable resources)
- Character Transcription

**Basic Written Chinese**

- Textbook
- Practice Essentials Workbook
- Audio CD
  - (Audio + Printable resources)

**Instructor’s Guide for Basic Spoken Chinese and Basic Written Chinese**

**Intermediate Spoken Chinese**

- Textbook
- Practice Essentials Workbook
- Video Software
- Audio CD
  - (Audio + Printable resources)
- Character Transcription

**Intermediate Written Chinese**

- Textbook
- Practice Essentials Workbook
- Audio CD
  - (Audio + Printable resources)

**Instructor’s Guide for Intermediate Spoken Chinese and Intermediate Written Chinese**

Several modes of study are possible for these materials: (1) the spoken series only; (2) a lesson in the spoken series followed a few days, weeks, or months later by the corresponding lesson in the written series; and (3) a lesson in the spoken and written series studied simultaneously. What is not possible is to study the written series first or only, since the written series assumes knowledge of the pronunciation system and relevant grammatical and cultural information, which are introduced in the spoken series.

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Basic Spoken Chinese

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Students embarking upon the study of Chinese should be aware that, along with Japanese, Korean, and Arabic, Chinese is one of the most difficult languages for native English speakers. This course makes no pretensions of being an “easy” introduction to the language. However, students can be assured that if they make the effort to master thoroughly the material presented here, they will acquire a solid foundation in Chinese.

The proficiency goals in speaking and reading by completion of the Intermediate Spoken Chinese and Intermediate Written Chinese portions of the course are Intermediate-Mid on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Chinese Proficiency Guidelines, which correlates with S-1/R-1 on the U.S. government Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Language Skill Level Descriptions. By the time they attain this level, learners will be able to conduct simple, practical conversations with Chinese speakers on a variety of everyday topics (cf. Table of Contents). They will also be able to read simple, connected texts printed in simplified or traditional Chinese characters and recognize about 600 high-frequency characters and common words written with them. Of course, they will not yet be able to conduct conversations on professional topics or read newspapers or novels, skills that in the case of Chinese take a considerably longer time to develop.

Some of the special features of Basic Spoken Chinese and Basic Written Chinese include:

**Separate but integrated tracks in spoken and written Chinese.** Most textbooks for teaching basic Chinese teach oral and written skills from the same materials, which are covered at a single rate of progress. Students typically study a dialog, learn how to use in their speech the words and grammar contained in the dialog, and also learn how to read and write every character used to write the dialog. But the fact is that, due to the inherent difficulty of Chinese characters, native English speakers can learn spoken Chinese words much faster than they can learn the characters used to write those words. As East Asian language pedagogues Eleanor H. Jorden and A. Ronald Walton have argued,* why must the rate of progress in spoken Chinese be slowed down to the maximum possible rate of progress in written Chinese? Moreover, in Chinese, more than in most languages, there are substantial differences between standard spoken style and standard written style, with many words and grammar patterns that are common in speech being rare in writing or vice versa. For all these reasons, this course uses separate but related materials for training in spoken and written Chinese. However, reflecting the fact that written Chinese is based on spoken Chinese, and so as to mutually reinforce the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), the written track is closely integrated with the spoken track. A day’s spoken lesson is based on a conversation typically introducing one to three new grammar patterns and 15 to 20 new spoken words, while the corresponding written lesson introduces six new high-frequency characters and a number of words that are written using them, chosen from among (but not including all of) the characters used to write the basic conversation of the corresponding lesson. Experience shows that the learning of written skills in Chinese proceeds more efficiently if learners study for reading and writing the characters for words they have previously learned for speaking and comprehension. Under this approach, when students take up a new lesson in written Chinese, they already know the pronunciations, meanings, and usages of the new words, needing only to learn their written representations—which considerably lightens the learning load. Such an approach also allows students and instructors maximum flexibility concerning at which point, how, and even whether, to introduce reading and writing.

**Graduated approach.** There is so much to learn to become proficient in Chinese that Chinese language learning can easily become overwhelming. By dividing large tasks into a series of many smaller ones, the learning of Chinese becomes more manageable. Therefore, each spoken lesson consists of only one fairly short (five-to twelve-line) conversation, while each written lesson introduces only six new characters. An added bonus to this approach is the sense of accomplishment learners feel through frequent completion of small tasks, rather than getting bogged down in long lessons that seem never-ending.

**Naturalness of the language.** A special effort has been made to present natural, idiomatic, up-to-date Chinese as opposed to stilted “textbook style.” This will be evident, for example, in the use of interjections, pause fillers, and final particles, which occur more frequently in this text than in most other Chinese language textbooks. Occasionally, for comprehension practice, we have included recordings of slightly accented Mandarin.

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speech, so as to familiarize learners with some of the more common variations in pronunciation they are likely to encounter.

**Authenticity of the language.** Chinese, like English, is a language spoken in a number of different societies, with multiple standards and varying usages. Although the emphasis of this course is on the core that is common to Mandarin Chinese wherever it is spoken, linguistic differences among the major Chinese speech communities as well as recent innovations are taken up where appropriate. Of the 96 basic conversations in *Basic Spoken Chinese* and *Intermediate Spoken Chinese*, the audio and video for 56 of them were recorded in Beijing, with another 31 recorded in Taipei, 3 in Hong Kong, one in Macao, 2 in Singapore, 2 in Malaysia, and one in the U.S. The relatively small number of terms that are restricted in use to a particular speech area are so indicated.

**Emphasis on the practical and immediately useful.** We have tried to present material that is high in frequency and has the most immediate “pay-off value” possible. An effort has been made to include the most useful words, grammar patterns, situations, and functions, based on several published frequency studies as well as research by the author. The units of this course have been arranged in order of general usefulness and practical importance. Although the course is designed to be studied from beginning to end, learners with time for only, say, the first five or ten units will at least be exposed to many of the most useful vocabulary items and structural patterns.

**Eclecticism of approach.** We believe that language is so complex and the personalities of learners so different, that no single approach or method can possibly meet the needs of all learners at all times. For this reason, the pedagogical approach we have chosen is purposefully eclectic. This course is proficiency-oriented and situational in approach with a carefully ordered underlying grammatical foundation. We have borrowed freely from the audio-lingual, communicative, functional-notional, and grammar-translation approaches.

**Maximum flexibility of use.** Student and teacher needs and personalities vary widely, as do the types of programs in which Chinese is taught. We have tried to leave options open whenever possible. This is true, for example, in the question of how to teach pronunciation; whether to teach the spoken skills only or also the written skills; when to introduce reading and writing; whether to teach simplified or traditional characters or both; and which of the exercises to do and in which order to do them. There is detailed discussion of all these and other questions in the Instructor’s Guide for *Basic Spoken Chinese* and *Basic Written Chinese*.

**Attention to sociolinguistic and cultural features.** Knowing how to say something with correct grammar and pronunciation is not sufficient for effective communication. Learners must know what to say and what not to say, when to say it, and how to adjust what they say for the occasion. How do the gender, age, and social position of the speaker and listener affect language? Finally, language does not exist apart from the culture of its speakers. What are the cultural assumptions of Chinese speakers? These are some of the matters to which we have tried to pay attention.

**Extensive built-in review.** In order to promote long-term retention of the material learned, a great effort has been made to recycle vocabulary and grammar periodically in later units in the textbook and *Practice Essentials* after they have been introduced. In addition, there is a review and study guide at the end of every unit.

**Attention to the needs of learners with prior knowledge of Chinese.** While the course is designed for beginners and assumes no prior knowledge of Chinese, it tries to take into account the special situation and needs of learners who possess some prior knowledge of the language acquired from home or residence overseas. Consequently, there are special notes on features of standard Mandarin pronunciation and usage that differ from the Cantonese or Taiwanese-influenced Mandarin to which some learners may have been exposed.

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**Organization and Use**

*Basic Spoken Chinese* introduces the Mandarin sound system, Hanyu Pinyin romanization, most of the major grammatical patterns of spoken Chinese, a core vocabulary of approximately 1,500 high-frequency words, and...
the sociolinguistic and cultural information needed for learners to use these various linguistic components appropriately.

The textbook for *Basic Spoken Chinese* contains ten units, each of which is on a common daily life situation in which Americans typically find themselves interacting with Chinese. On the first page of each unit are listed the topic and communicative objectives for the unit. The communicative objectives reflect important language functions and give the learning a purpose. Learners should be sure to read through the objectives, since they will be more receptive to learning if they understand the purpose of the learning and have an idea of what to expect.

Every unit is divided into four parts, each of which includes the following sections:

**Context:** On the first page of each part you will see the title of the lesson, an image of the situation drawn from the on-location video, and a description of the situation. We always explain the sociolinguistic and cultural context, for example: where the conversation is taking place, who the speakers are, their positions in society, how well they know each other, their age, their gender, etc. It is important that learners study the image and read the description, so they have a clear idea of the context for the basic conversation they will be studying.

**Basic Conversation:** The basic conversations, which constitute the core of each lesson, normally consist of a conversation between one American and one (or occasionally more than one) Chinese speaker. The purpose of the conversations is to introduce high-frequency structural patterns, vocabulary, and cultural information that is relevant to learners’ likely future needs in a situation-oriented format. To help make each conversation “come to life” and to show details of the sociolinguistic and cultural background, audio and video recordings of the basic conversations have been prepared, which should be used in conjunction with the textbook. The basic conversations are next presented in “Build Up” format, with each sentence of the basic conversation broken down into manageable chunks with pauses provided for repetition, so as to help learners gain fluency. In the textbook, the “Build Up” is presented in two columns: romanization, on the left; and English translation and word class, on the right. By working with the audio recordings and textbook, the student should thoroughly memorize the basic conversation so he or she can role play it (in class with the instructor and other students the next day, or, for independent learners, by using the software’s conversation options) prior to beginning the drills and exercises. To a significant extent, the student has mastered the lesson to the degree that he or she has internalized the basic conversation. Of course, memorization of the basic conversation is only the first step in attaining communicative competence.

**Supplementary Vocabulary:** This section presents important supplementary vocabulary that, in many cases, is related in some way to the material introduced in the basic conversation. The supplementary vocabulary, which is included on the audio recordings after the basic conversation, is required for learning and may reoccur later in the course without further explanation.

**Additional Vocabulary:** This section, which exists only for some lessons, presents other useful words related to the content of the lesson for the learner's reference. The additional vocabulary, which is designed for students with extra time who desire to be challenged, is not required to be learned and will not reoccur in later lessons.

**Grammatical and Cultural Notes:** The major new grammatical structures in the basic conversation are here explained and exemplified from the point of view of the native English-speaking learner. There are also miscellaneous comments on the basic conversation, supplementary vocabulary, and additional vocabulary. A special effort has been made to incorporate important sociolinguistic and cultural information as well as practical advice for the learner of Chinese.

**Review and Study Guide:** At the end of every unit, there is a review and study guide consisting of: (1) the new vocabulary introduced in the basic conversation and supplementary vocabulary of the four parts of the unit, arranged according to word class; and (2) a list of the major new grammar patterns introduced in the unit, with an indication of where they first occurred.
An Overview of the Chinese Language

The primary emphasis of this course is on learning Chinese rather than learning about Chinese. Nevertheless, the Chinese language has so many special features about which there are so many common misconceptions, that it will help put your study of Chinese in better perspective to begin with a brief survey of the history and current status of the language.

HISTORY

Chinese is a member of the Sino-Tibetan language family. This means it is related to languages such as Burmese and Tibetan, though too distantly to be apparent except to a specialist. To the best of our current knowledge, Chinese is unrelated to the Indo-European language family, to which English and most other European languages belong; nor is it genetically related to Japanese or Korean, even though its writing system and a portion of its vocabulary were borrowed and adapted by speakers of those languages.

By about 500 BCE, there had developed in the Yellow River Valley of North China a language now known as Old Chinese. This is the language which was spoken and written by Confucius and Mencius and which, more or less, was the ancestor of all the modern Chinese dialects. While spoken Old Chinese, like all languages, continued to evolve over the succeeding centuries, written Old Chinese—usually referred to as Guówén or “Classical Chinese”—became relatively fixed in form at an early date and changed little until the first few decades of the twentieth century.

With the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the twin issues of language standardization and language reform, which were considered essential for the building of a modern nation, attracted the attention of increasing numbers of intellectuals. In 1913 the Ministry of Education of the newly established Republic of China sponsored a Conference on the Unification of Pronunciation which, after protracted discussion, proclaimed the dialect of North China, known in English as Mandarin, as the Guóyǔ or “National Language” of China.

Several years later, in 1917, the American-educated philosopher and literary critic Hu Shih spearheaded a movement to replace Classical Chinese with written Mandarin, or Báihuà, as the standard written language. This movement, known as the Xin Wènxué Yǒndòng “New Literature Movement,” gradually gained support during the 1920s and 1930s. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the new government continued the previous government’s policy of promoting Mandarin, to which it gave the new name Putónghuà “Common Speech.” Beginning in the 1950s, a number of important reforms were implemented in China including standardization of variant characters, promotion of simplified characters, adoption of the horizontal style of writing, and creation of Hanyu Pinyin romanization.

Today, Mandarin Chinese is the native language of more people than any other language in the world; in fact, there are more native speakers of Mandarin than of English and Spanish, the languages in third and fourth place, combined (Hindi/Urdu is in second place). What is more, four of the twenty most widely spoken languages in the world are different dialects of Chinese. Chinese is also, after English and Spanish, the third most widely spoken language in the U.S.

In the same way that English is spoken as a native language in a number of different countries, Chinese is spoken in several different countries and societies. It is the national language of the People’s Republic of China on the Chinese mainland, Hainan, and numerous smaller islands; it is also the national language of the Republic of China on Taiwan and several smaller island groups; and it is one of the official languages of the Republic of Singapore. In addition, Mandarin is spoken widely by the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia, who make up approximately one-fourth of the population. While different standards and usages exist among these various types of Chinese, they all represent slightly different forms of the same language and are, with few exceptions, mutually intelligible.
LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

The languages of China are distributed over three large zones (see Figure 1). The first zone consists of the borderlands of North and West China, where non-Chinese languages such as Mongolian, Uighur, and Tibetan have traditionally been spoken. In the second zone, which stretches from Heilongjiang in the Northeast across most of northern and central China to Yunnan in the Southwest, four major varieties of Mandarin are the native language. The third zone extends from southern Jiangsu across southeastern China to southern Guangxi; here, six widely divergent Chinese dialects are the daily language of the people.

The four major varieties of Mandarin spoken in the second zone include: (1) Běífāng Guānhuà “Northern Mandarin,” spoken in Beijing, Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang; (2) Xīběi Guānhuà “Northwestern Mandarin,” spoken in Shanxi, Shaanxi, Ningxia, and Gansu; (3) Xīnán Guānhuà “Southwestern Mandarin,” spoken in Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and northern Guangxi; and (4) Xiàjiāng Guānhuà “Lower Yangtze Mandarin,” spoken in Anhui and most of Hubei and Jiangsu. The differences among the four varieties of Mandarin are about as great as among American, Canadian, British, and Australian English.

The six major non-Mandarin dialects spoken in the third zone are: (1) Wūyǔ “Wu,” spoken in Shanghai, Southern Jiangsu, and Zhejiang; (2) Yuēyǔ “Yue” or “Cantonese,” spoken in Guangdong and most of Guangxi; (3) Xiāngyǔ “Xiang,” spoken in Hunan; (4) Mìnyǔ “Min,” spoken in Fujian, Taiwan, Hainan, and part of Guangdong; (5) Kèyǔ “Hakka,” spoken in parts of Guangdong, Jiangxi, Fujian, and Taiwan as well as in small concentrations in other provinces of China; and (6) Gān yǔ “Gan,” which is spoken in Jiangxi. The relationship among Mandarin and the other six Chinese dialects is comparable to that among the Romance languages (e.g., French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish).
By purely linguistic criteria, Mandarin and the other six major Chinese dialects would be called languages rather than dialects, since they are all mutually unintelligible (i.e., speakers of one cannot understand speakers of another). For political and cultural reasons, however, they are usually termed dialects. The dialects differ most of all in pronunciation, to a lesser degree in vocabulary (more for everyday terms than for academic vocabulary), and least in grammar (though there are important differences there, too). Dialect speakers nowadays typically speak in their native dialect (and Mandarin, if they know it), but read and write in written Mandarin, which they have learned in school. The common claim that the various Chinese dialects are pronounced differently but are all written the same is not really true; if the dialects are written as they are spoken (which Cantonese and Taiwanese sometimes are), they are not fully comprehensible to readers from other parts of China.

Today, in both mainland China and Taiwan, dialect speakers—especially younger, urban residents—are likely to have some degree of proficiency in Mandarin, which they have studied in school and hear in the public media, but which they will most likely speak with a local accent. Should some of you already be familiar with a non-Mandarin dialect, this will be useful to you in learning Mandarin, though you will need to be attentive to the differences. By the same token, proficiency in Mandarin greatly reduces the amount of time required to learn a second Chinese dialect (or, to a lesser extent, Japanese, Korean, or Vietnamese).

PRONUNCIATION

One feature that distinguishes Mandarin from other Chinese dialects is its relative phonological simplicity, since of all the major dialects it has the smallest number of tones and the fewest final consonants. Compared to other languages, the sound system of Chinese is relatively simple. There are only about 400 basic syllables—far fewer than in English, which has several thousand. A Chinese syllable is traditionally divided into an initial sound, which some syllables lack, and a final sound, which is always present. The final sound normally includes a tone.

The initials, of which there are 23, are all single consonant sounds, there being no consonant clusters like [spl] or [nts] as in English splints. The finals, of which there are 34, all end in a vowel, -r, -n, or -ng. In addition, most Chinese syllables are pronounced with one of four tones. The same basic syllable pronounced with different tones is likely to have completely different meanings.

The tones of Chinese are one of the special characteristics of the language. Another is the fact that almost all Chinese syllables have distinct meanings of their own, even if they can’t all be used independently in speech. For this reason, Chinese is often referred to as being “monosyllabic.” But this should not be taken to mean that every Chinese word has only one syllable. Indeed, the majority of words in Chinese today have two syllables.

GRAMMAR

Many people, both Chinese and non-Chinese, have claimed that Chinese “has no grammar.” What they usually mean by this is that the endings of Chinese words don’t change depending on gender, case, number, person, or tense, as in many Western languages. For this reason, in typological classifications of languages, Chinese is often termed an “isolating” or “analytic” language. For the same reason, Chinese formerly had a reputation in the West as being a primitive language.

Actually, Chinese has its share of grammar rules, even if some of these are different kinds of rules than those of Western languages. In general, Chinese grammar depends heavily on word order, function words (independent particles that mark grammatical functions), and context. Some of the salient features of Chinese grammar include:

1. **Normal sentence order** is Subject-Verb-Object, as in English (though the subject and object are often omitted, and the object is sometimes placed at the beginning of the sentence).

2. **Topic/Comment** is often a more appropriate major division within a sentence than Subject/Predicate.
3. **Adjectives** (which are in this textbook termed stative verbs) can function as verbs when in verb position (e.g., fángzi xiăo “the house smalls/the house is small”).

4. **Adjectives** (or stative verbs) precede nouns, as in English (e.g., xiăo + fángzi = “small” + “house”).

5. **Verbs have aspect rather than tense** (e.g., is the action of the verb continuous or completed? Has it ever been experienced before?).

6. **Measures, also termed classifiers,** are used immediately before nouns when the nouns are modified by a number or specifier (e.g., sănzhăng zhuōzǐ “three flat-things tables”).

7. **Reduplication,** i.e., repeating the same syllable twice, is frequently used to alter the meanings of words.

**VOCABULARY**

Chinese words may consist of one or more than one syllable, e.g., shū “book,” péngyou “friend,” dăzī “typewriter.” However, two-syllable words predominate. Words of two or more syllables are easily broken down into their constituent parts because each part usually has its own meaning and its own character, when written. The syllable is thus the basic building block of Chinese.

Because of the long and largely independent development of Chinese culture, there are few cognates between Chinese and English. Until quite recently, the cultural and social backgrounds of these two languages were almost totally different. The number of Chinese words, especially in literary and historical works, is enormous. During the last century, a fair number of words have been borrowed from English and other Western languages into Chinese and vice versa. In some cases, the sound of the Western word was borrowed into Chinese, as in the words léidá “radar” and kēlè “cola.” More typical, however, are loan translations such as diànhuà “electric speech—telephone” and huŏché “fire cart—train,” where the meaning of the foreign term is translated into Chinese.

**Suggested Strategies for Learning Spoken Chinese**

Chinese has for centuries had a reputation as being a language difficult or even impossible for Westerners to learn. It is quite true that for a native speaker of English to learn Chinese is a task of a whole different order than learning another Western language. The experience of the U.S. government language training agencies, for example, has shown that it takes about four times as long to train someone to a level where they can function professionally in Chinese as it takes in French or Spanish.

While it is important to realize the considerably greater investment of time and effort required to learn Chinese and to understand that, even after years of study, one is still not likely to approach the full range of skills of an educated native speaker, it is also true that the difficulty of Chinese tends to be overrated. Chinese is very learnable. The many Americans—including students, scholars, business people, and government personnel—is—who have learned Chinese well are proof of this.

The basics of spoken Chinese, in particular, aren’t really that hard at all. There are no verb conjugations or noun declensions to memorize, and the pronunciation system is limited to some four hundred-odd syllables. True, the Chinese characters present problems not encountered in an alphabetic writing system, and the sociolinguistic conventions and cultural background of Chinese are quite different from those of most Western languages. However, due to recent systematizations and simplifications in the Chinese language, advances in language pedagogy (better dictionaries, textbooks, and teaching methods), and the fact that Chinese and Western culture are moving ever closer together, the Chinese language is today considerably easier to learn than it used to be.

In studying Chinese, it’s important not only to work hard but also to work smart. Listed below are some suggestions and strategies for learning Chinese that have helped others. Language learning is a personal thing and what works for one person will not necessarily work for another; nevertheless, you may wish to consider adopting some of these strategies for your own use.
GENERAL STRATEGIES
1. **Try to think in Chinese as much as possible.** Think in terms of images of things whenever you can and try to keep English out. In general, your approach should be to learn to speak and behave in as Chinese a manner as possible. At first it is natural to engage in a certain amount of translation, but you should make the effort to think directly in Chinese as soon as you can.

2. **Be aware** that there is more to language than the verbal signal and that the environment in which your mind best assimilates language is not a grammatical one but a communicative one. Learning to communicate in Chinese requires that you try to understand the whole web of expressions, gestures, actions, beliefs, and values of the Chinese people, i.e., the cultural assumptions that are part of being Chinese.

3. **Practice being a good observer** of members of Chinese culture—what Chinese people say, what they do as they speak, their gestures, expressions, etc. Also, be aware of your own behavior as it reflects your implicit attitude (or perceived attitude) toward Chinese culture. Try to be sensitive to those things in your conduct which members of Chinese society may find inappropriate. For example, putting your feet on a table or pointing at people with your forefinger would not be considered good manners. Similarly, you should not wear very casual clothes to class, wear a cap in class, or bring food to class if you’re attending school in China or if your instructor or mentor is new to American culture.

TIME MANAGEMENT
1. **Learning Chinese takes a long time,** so smart use of time is important. If you are enrolled in a group class, then by all means attend every class session; frequent cutting equals certain disaster. Occasionally, a student who because of illness did not have time to prepare for class may decide to skip that class and instead use the time to catch up. Do not do this; though the intention is good, the result is that you will get further and further behind.

2. Set aside a definite time for studying Chinese each day and stick to it. A conscientiously observed daily schedule would be a good idea. Find the best time of day to do your studying; don’t do it when you have other things on your mind or are exhausted, since your mind has to be receptive for effective learning to take place.

3. **An appropriate place for your studying is also important.** You should not choose a place (such as a shared dorm room) where you will frequently be interrupted or distracted. By providing a place specifically for oral language practice, a language learning center or language lab, if available, can help ensure concentration and efficient learning.

4. **For a college or university-level course** that meets an hour each day in class and covers one lesson per day (i.e., one part of the four parts of each unit) in both *Basic Spoken Chinese* and *Basic Written Chinese*, the average student will need to study two to three hours out of class on their own or in the language lab. Be flexible in arranging your study schedule. Instead of spending three straight hours all on Chinese, it would be more effective for most students to divide their study time into two or three separate study sessions.

IMPORTANCE OF ORAL PRACTICE
1. **The most important kind of class preparation** is working with the audio recordings that accompany the textbook. When working with the recordings, be active rather than passive. Always repeat after, or participate in, the drills on which you are working. Though it is fine to run through new material the first time with your book open, by the second or third time, your book should be closed (this is harder but more effective). When you are practicing, speak out loud—and as loud as possible! Experience has shown that people learn languages better when they practice out loud. You should never learn the spoken material primarily from studying the
romanized Chinese in your textbook; rather, you should learn from spoken models—your teachers and the voices on the audio recordings.

2. **Both in class and when listening to the audio recordings**, force yourself to listen closely. Always stay attentive to the meaning of what you hear. It is easy when doing a drill to, like a machine, mechanically spew forth the answer; but this is of much less benefit to you than also thinking of the meaning. The more active you are in your own learning process, the faster you will progress.

3. **Pay special attention to pronunciation.** A mispronounced initial, final, or tone will often make a word incomprehensible to a Chinese speaker. Accuracy of sentence rhythm and stress are also important in making your speech understandable. The pronunciation habits you establish during the first few weeks and months are likely to stay with you the remainder of your Chinese-speaking days, since it is difficult to correct bad habits later.

4. **Begin by focusing on accuracy, not speed.** Don’t slur over words; there is no need to rush through a sentence. Speed will gradually develop over time. When you are practicing, say each phrase or sentence enough times so that you can render it with a reasonable degree of fluency.

5. **When the instructor calls on other students, avoid the temptation to tune out.** Listen carefully at all times and, to the extent possible, perform every classroom activity yourself. When the instructor asks another student a question, you also should prepare a response and answer silently yourself. Then listen as the teacher corrects the other student. This approach will help you get the most out of every class hour.

**SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES**

1. **Memorize each basic conversation thoroughly**, so you can perform it accurately and fluently in class. It is essential to internalize the new words and grammar patterns, so they will be available to you for your own creative use when needed. Doing this will greatly aid your fluency and naturalness of speaking. Memorization takes time and may not be the most interesting thing to do, but as an initial step in language learning, it is very effective.

2. **Students sometimes question the necessity of repetition, drill, and memorization.** Certainly, these are only the first steps leading to our ultimate goal of communicative competence. However, they are very important steps, since they firmly establish in your brain the sounds and structures of the language for you to draw on later in your own creative speech. We hope that you understand the importance of these activities and ask that you work hard at them.

3. **One of the most effective ways of learning is to test yourself frequently.** For example, after you have worked with the audio recordings and studied the words and sentences on a page of the textbook, fold a sheet of paper down the long end, covering up the left-hand side of the page where the Chinese is, and see if you can reconstruct the Chinese by looking at the English. Flash cards are another useful learning device, since you can take them with you anywhere. Moreover, with flash cards it’s easy to identify those cards that you frequently get wrong and remove them from the larger set for special attention.

4. **Learn phrases, sentences, and dialogs, not just individual vocabulary items.** By learning vocabulary in context (as part of phrases, sentences, and dialogs), you will be able to use it correctly in your own speech. Structural patterns are especially important, since grammar is the “glue” that holds all else together. Once you have internalized a pattern, it will be easy to substitute appropriate vocabulary items into it as necessary.

5. **If you don’t know or forget the exact word for something, paraphrase.** For example, if you can’t remember how to say “train station,” then say “the place where trains stop” or “there are a lot of trains there.”

6. **Work out a systematic personal review program.** A half hour daily or several hours on the weekend spent in thorough review of past material would be very useful. But be careful not to spend excessive time on
review. The material currently being worked on in class should always have priority.

7. **Use your Chinese outside of class as much as possible.** If you have a chance to listen to a lecture in Chinese or to see a Chinese film or television program, be sure to take advantage of the opportunity. If there are Chinese restaurants or other Chinese ethnic establishments where you live, patronize them and take advantage of the chance to further hone your language skills. You might also want to contact the representative offices of the various Chinese-speaking countries and societies to learn about activities in your area which they sponsor. In short, do all you can to take advantage of and create opportunities to use Chinese.

**DEALING WITH ERRORS**

1. **Don’t be embarrassed or frustrated by your mistakes,** as they are a natural part of the language learning process. Try to develop what the Chinese call 开口勇气  “the courage to open your mouth.” It may reassure you to know that, partially through natural politeness and partially because of the tremendous amount of dialectal variation in China, Chinese speakers are generally quite tolerant of mistakes in Chinese grammar and pronunciation and will usually be willing to communicate with you even if your Chinese is not correct.

2. **When the teacher corrects you, pay close attention.** Try to understand what was wrong and what the correct Chinese should be. Then make use of the corrected Chinese in your Chinese conversation later that day, so that you remember it. When you are corrected, be grateful to your instructor and make it clear to her or him that you appreciate the corrections.

3. **Many students find it useful to keep a notebook** of their most common errors with corrections. There is a famous saying in Sunzi’s *Art of War*: 知己知彼，百戰百勝 “Know yourself and know your adversary, and in a hundred battles you will have a hundred victories.” Understanding where your own weak points lie is often the first step toward eliminating them.

**BE POSITIVE AND FLEXIBLE**

1. **When you don’t understand something, try to guess the meaning from the context.** Rather than focusing on the part you don’t understand, listen to the message as a whole and see if you can make out the probable general meaning. Learn to treat uncertainty as part of the process of language learning.

2. **In your learning of Chinese, be aware of the difference between “fact”** (understanding how the language works) and “act” (being able to use the language). Both of these are important for adult language learners, with “fact” serving as an important enabling mechanism leading to and enhancing “act,” but ultimately “act” is the more important. Personal learning styles differ, with some students learning best via a detailed understanding of the grammar followed by copious practice, and others learning best through practice alone. Some students prefer the oral mode, while others like to see the language as it is written. Each student must devise her or his own best method of learning, but the goal for everyone is the same—accurate, natural, effective control of the language. Seek to understand your own particular learning style and focus on your strengths, exploiting your personal learning style to your greatest advantage. At the same time, you should remain open to new possibilities and not be afraid to try out new language learning techniques or methods.

3. **You may find that after a period of obvious and satisfying progress,** you suddenly reach a “plateau” where learning seems to come to a standstill. This is a natural and frequently occurring phenomenon for language students. If this should happen to you, don’t worry too much about it. First, you are probably still progressing, just not aware of it. Second, even if you really are on a plateau, things will probably seem better soon. If you have questions about your progress, you should feel free to speak with your instructor.

4. **Be patient and realistic.** Chinese is a difficult language and takes much time to learn. On the one hand, by the time you complete this course, you should be able to handle simple everyday conversation and “get
around” in China. On the other hand, due to the nature of the Chinese characters, it will take several years of hard work until you can read Chinese newspapers and books with any degree of fluency. But don’t demand too much of yourself, either. Be proud of what you do know; don’t always just berate yourself for what you don’t know!

A NOTE FOR STUDENTS OF CHINESE HERITAGE

In recent years, a growing number of students of Chinese heritage have been entering basic Chinese language programs in the U.S. These learners may have spent part of their childhood in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan; or they may have been exposed to Chinese at home in the U.S.; or they may have studied Chinese in a Chinese heritage community language school. While some of these students have no practical Chinese language proficiency, others may possess a wide range of abilities ranging from simple listening comprehension to speaking to the ability to read and write but in a non-Mandarin dialect. Learners of Chinese heritage may also be familiar with aspects of Chinese culture and society.

This course is designed for students with no previous background in Chinese. If you do have some prior background, that will certainly be useful to you. At the same time, there are some aspects of Chinese language learning such as romanization, grammar, formal vocabulary, characters, and study skills that you will probably have to work at just as hard as everyone else. Also, note that this course teaches standard usage (basically, the dialect of Beijing), but many students of Chinese heritage in the U.S. speak with southern Chinese pronunciation and grammar. Where appropriate, we will refer to special problems faced by students of Chinese heritage, for example, as regards non-standard pronunciation and usage.

A NOTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Whereas in the past, beginning Chinese language classes at American colleges and universities consisted largely of American students, that assumption can no longer be made, as many American institutions of higher learning are internationalizing. Now, there are not a few students from Europe or from Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and elsewhere who choose to study Chinese in America. This is, of course, in many respects a welcome development; for example, students of diverse cultural backgrounds bring valuable assets to the language classroom, especially at the intermediate and advanced levels, since it is then often possible to conduct livelier and richer discussions when comparing the U.S., China, and other countries.

At the same time, it is also true that the most efficient way to teach adults a foreign language, especially at the basic level, is to group together students sharing the same native language and cultural background. This simplifies instruction, since those of the same background will typically face similar learning challenges and make similar mistakes. Moreover, in discussing pronunciation, grammar, and culture, the instructor can then point out similarities and differences between the “target” language and culture (Chinese) and the “base” language and culture (the English language and American culture).

For the reasons given in the preceding paragraph, this series of textbooks is designed first and foremost for American college and university students. If you should hail from another country, you can still put these materials to good use but occasionally there may be comments that do not apply to you or perhaps exercises that are too easy for you. In such cases, we ask for your patience and understanding. If you ever have questions about any aspect of Chinese language and culture that are not covered in the notes to each lesson, you should always feel free to ask your instructor.

A NOTE FOR INDEPENDENT LEARNERS

Though most learners of Chinese using Basic Spoken Chinese will be learning in a class with an instructor, these materials have been designed so that you may use them to learn Chinese on your own, if you so choose. Learning on your own actually has a number of advantages, including the freedom to learn at your own pace, and the flexibility to learn at a time and location of your convenience. However, to be a successful independent learner, you need to be disciplined, self-motivated, and willing to assume complete responsibility for your own language learning.
If you’re an independent learner, then most of the strategies and comments discussed above apply to you also. Since you don’t have access to an instructor, it’s especially important for you to spend sufficient time working with the audio and video materials that accompany this textbook. You should also be sure to acquire and use to maximum advantage the accompanying *Basic Spoken Chinese Practice Essentials*, which was designed to provide lots of additional practice of the material introduced in the textbook.

As an independent learner, you should make a schedule as regards the amount of time to devote to language study and the rate of progress through the materials and then stick to it if at all possible. Ideal would be to spend an hour or two every day working with the audio, video, and print materials. If you can’t spend an hour every day, then spend as much time as you can, but be aware that daily exposure to the language—even if for only twenty or thirty minutes a day—is more effective than a longer study period on the weekend. In the case of learners in a class, each part of each unit is designed for one hour of classroom instruction and two to three hours of self-study; so for an independent learner like you, four to five hours of self-study for each part should be about right. But if you find you can’t do the various audio drills quickly enough in the pauses provided (without peeking at the text), or if you can’t perform the role plays in the *Practice Essentials* fairly fluently, then that is probably a sign you aren’t yet sufficiently familiar with the material, so you should review some more before moving on.

Now, an obvious disadvantage of learning on your own is that you don’t have an instructor to interact with and guide you. To remedy this, you should try to find a native Chinese-speaking tutor or mentor who can meet with you once or twice a week to serve as your conversation partner, correct you, and answer questions that you may have. Perhaps a Chinese friend or Chinese foreign student in the area where you live could fill this role. Try to choose someone who has a clear voice and speaks standard Mandarin; since many Chinese speak Mandarin with an accent, you could perhaps ask other Chinese people if the person you are thinking of choosing as tutor speaks “good Chinese.” Your tutor should be lively and outgoing; it’s of less importance how good her or his English is. Do be sure to compensate your tutor in an appropriate manner—you could pay them by the hour, tutor them or their children in English in separate sessions, or help them in some other way.

To help your tutor conduct the tutorial sessions, you should obtain from the publisher of this book a copy of the Instructor’s Guide for *Basic Chinese* to give your tutor. It contains detailed suggestions for using these materials as well as many questions and other exercises for each part that you and your tutor can work on during the tutorial sessions. If your tutor is not used to reading the Pinyin romanization in the *Basic Spoken Chinese* textbook, you may also wish to give her or him the *Basic Spoken Chinese* Character Transcription.

Assuming a one-hour tutorial session, we suggest that the first 40–45 minutes be conducted in Chinese only, with no English spoken by either the learner or the tutor. We recommend the following procedures:

1. **Learner and tutor role-play** the basic conversation in the textbook (the learner should be able to perform the conversation without reference to the text—in other words, have it memorized).

2. **Tutor asks learner the Chinese questions in the Instructor’s Guide.**

3. **Tutor asks other questions in Chinese using the new vocabulary and grammar of the lesson.**

4. **Learner and tutor do the role play exercises in the Practice Essentials.**

5. **Learner and tutor go over the translation exercises in the Practice Essentials** (the learner should have prepared them in writing in advance).

6. **If there is time remaining, material introduced in earlier lessons can be reviewed.**

During the last 15–20 minutes of the tutorial session, either Chinese or English can be used. You can ask any questions you may have and your tutor can provide answers and offer any relevant comments or explanations. During the first few weeks, it would be best if you didn’t ask how to say things that don’t appear in the textbook. Even after several months, you shouldn’t ask for too much “extra” vocabulary, as doing so tends to slow down your progress; it’s generally best to stick with what is introduced in the textbook.
Pronunciation and Romanization

Getting Started

The first task facing you as you set about learning Chinese is to gain control over the sound system of the language. This is because sound is the medium through which the spoken language (and, in a more indirect way, the written language) is conveyed. Even if your main objective should be reading Chinese, this objective is most efficiently attained by starting with speaking and pronunciation. The reason for this is that to be able to read fluently, with full intellectual and emotional comprehension, one should know the spoken language in which a text was written. Gaining control over the sound system of Chinese will involve two different but related goals: (1) being able to recognize the sounds of Chinese when someone else produces them and (2) being able to produce the sounds of Chinese yourself.

Unlike some of your other tasks in learning Chinese, such as learning grammar, vocabulary, and characters—which will keep you busy for a fairly long time to come, the pronunciation system is closed-ended and, while there are some important differences from English, not so difficult to learn. Since the pronunciation you develop during your first few weeks of learning Chinese is likely to a large extent to stay with you for the rest of your Chinese-speaking days—and to a large degree will determine whether or not people understand you and what effect your speech has on them, it is crucial that you do all you can now to acquire the best pronunciation possible.

You will find that the investment in time and energy you make at the outset in acquiring a good pronunciation will be well worth your while later. Accuracy in pronunciation is even more important in Chinese than in most other languages. The reason for this is that the number of different basic syllables in Chinese is quite limited—only about 400, compared with many thousands in English. This means that every sound is important in distinguishing one word from another; the margin for error is much smaller than in other languages.

Transcription Systems for Chinese

As you no doubt are already aware, Chinese is ordinarily written in Chinese characters. However, as the characters take time to learn and do not provide information on pronunciation in a systematic manner, it is more efficient to begin the study of Chinese via a transcription system. Many transcription systems have been devised in the last few centuries in both China and the West. For example, the word for “China” is written as follows in several common transcriptions:

- **Wade-Giles romanization:** Chung¹-kuo²
- **National Phonetic Alphabet:** ㄓㄨㄥ ㄎㄨㄛ
- **National Romanization:** Jong.gwo
- **Yale romanization:** J hνnggw½
- **Hanyu Pinyin romanization:** Zhōngguó

Of the transcription systems above, Hanyu Pinyin romanization has come to be the most widely used. It is the official system of transcription for Chinese in China and Singapore, where it is used as a tool to teach Chinese characters to children, to indicate in dictionaries the pronunciations of characters which adult Chinese readers might not know, to spell Chinese words in Western-language publications, and to compile Chinese language textbooks for foreigners. The Pinyin system is the transcription system we will be using in this text.

The written symbols of Pinyin, which literally means “spell a sound,” are basically the same as those of the Roman alphabet except that the letter v is not used. In referring to the letters of the Pinyin alphabet, the Chinese people use their own set of appellations, which are somewhat similar to French or German (e.g., a b c is pronounced something like “ah,” “bay,” “tsay”). However, it is not necessary to learn these since, when referring to the constituent components of written Chinese, you will be talking in terms of characters, not Pinyin. On the relatively rare occasions when you do need to refer to Pinyin letters, you can use the English names for the symbols.
The Sounds of Mandarin

The basic unit of Mandarin pronunciation is the syllable. A typical Mandarin syllable is composed of three parts: an initial sound, a final sound, and a tone. For example, in the syllable mă “scold,” m is the initial, a is the final, and the mark “” represents the tone. Some syllables lack an initial and some syllables, when they are unstressed, have no tone; but every syllable must have a final.

In Pinyin the same letter may have two or more different pronunciations depending on the environment in which it occurs (i.e., what letters come before or after). For example, the i in the syllable xi sounds different from the i in the syllable zi, or the u in gu sounds different from the u in ju. Therefore, it is best to learn Mandarin pronunciation via syllables rather than focusing on individual letters.

The initials and finals of Mandarin are listed below in the traditional order with instructions on how to produce them and a comparison with the closest English sounds. There is also a pronunciation exercise for each initial and final, which includes several examples of syllables containing the sounds being practiced, almost all of them in Tone One. The pronunciation exercises are included on the accompanying audio recordings. Later, this section can serve as a reference if you should forget which Mandarin sound a Pinyin symbol stands for and don’t have access to a native speaker or the audio recordings.

How to Learn Chinese Pronunciation

In class, listen attentively to your teachers, carefully observing their lip, tongue, and mouth movements. Mimic your instructors loudly and actively, trying to sound as “Chinese” as possible. Drill enthusiastically and be receptive to correction. You will want to work on both producing sounds correctly and recognizing them accurately.

For out-of-class study, read the descriptions of the sounds and the suggestions for producing them below. Work intensively with the audio recordings that accompany this section. Listen carefully, then repeat during the pause provided after each item. The first few times work with your book open, then practice with your book closed. Be sure to repeat out loud—and as loud (within reasonable limits, of course) as possible. The reasons for practicing in a loud voice are that, when speaking quietly, you are apt to be less precise in your pronunciation than when speaking aloud; and that speaking loudly helps build your confidence.

When reading Pinyin transcription, always remember that the symbols you see before you represent Chinese sounds—not English sounds. In the same way that French, German, and Spanish are written with the Roman alphabet but are not pronounced the same as English, Pinyin stands for Chinese sounds, many of which are very different from English. For example, what is spelled he căn diè or you li kē a tiè in Pinyin is pronounced quite differently and is completely unrelated in meaning to English he can die and you like a tie! So beware of the natural tendency to give English pronunciations to the Pinyin symbols. Trust your ears, not your eyes.

The pronunciation exercises were recorded in Beijing by native speakers in their early twenties who were born and raised in that city. While all of the examples are real words or parts of words, you do not need to learn the meanings at this point but should focus on learning the correct pronunciations and correct Pinyin spellings of the various sounds.

* The comparisons with English involve approximations, not exact equivalents. Our standard of comparison is American English as spoken on the U.S. West coast. Since few Chinese sounds are exactly like English, it is important to listen carefully to your instructor and the accompanying recordings.
Pronunciation and Romanization

INITIALS

B
Like the p in English spy or spa. It differs from English b as in by in that English b is voiced (i.e., your Adam’s apple is buzzing while you say it) while Mandarin b is voiceless. Hint: If you’re having problems, first say spa, then hiss the s on spa like this: sssspa. Then, remove the s.

Pronunciation Exercise A-1
1. bƗ “eight” 3. bƗ “pack” 5. bɭn “move” 7. bɭng “help”
2. bƗ “force” 4. bɭ “cup of” 6. bɭn “run” 8. bɭng “soldier”

P
Like the p in English pie but with a stronger puff of breath. Similar to p plus the following h in English hop high.

Pronunciation Exercise A-2
1. pƗ “lie” 3. pƗ “pat” 5. PƗn (surname) 7. piƗng “essay”

M
Like the m in English my.

Pronunciation Exercise A-3
1. mƗ “mom” 3. mƗ “cat” 5. mɭ “moo” 7. mɭng “cheat”
2. mɭ “grope” 4. miɭ “meow” 6. mɭn “stuffy”

F
Like the f in English fight.

Pronunciation Exercise A-4
1. fƗ “issue” 3. fɭi “fly” 5. fɭn “divide” 7. fɭng “square”
2. fɲ “husband” [BF] 4. fɭ “overturn” 6. fɭng “wind”

D
Like the t in English steam. It differs from English d as in day in that English d is voiced while Mandarin d is voiceless. Mandarin d is produced by most speakers with the tip of the tongue in a slightly more forward position than in English. Hiss the s on stew like this: sssstew. Then divide that into ssss-tew. Finally, omit the sss- altogether. The end result should be close to Mandarin du.

Pronunciation Exercise A-5
1. dƗ “get on” 3. dɭ “stay” 5. diɭ “dad” 7. duɭn “hold”
2. dɲ “low” 4. dɭo “knife” 6. duɭ “much” 8. dɭng “lamp”

T
Like the t in tea but with a stronger puff of breath. Mandarin t is produced by most speakers with the tip of the tongue in a slightly more forward position than in English. Similar to the t plus the following h in English can’t he.

Pronunciation Exercise A-6
1. tƗ “she” 3. tɭ “stick” 5. tiɭn “day” 7. tɭng “soup”
2. tɲ “kick” 4. tɭ “push” 6. tɭn “swallow” 8. tɭng “listen”

* The abbreviation [BF] after an example stands for Bound Form and indicates that the syllable in question is in normal speech always bound to another syllable or word. In other words, a syllable marked as [BF] can’t ordinarily be said by itself.
Pronunciation and Romanization

N
Like the n in English neat. Mandarin n is produced by most speakers with the tip of the tongue in a slightly more forward position than in English.

Pronunciation Exercise A-7
1. Ná (surname) 3. niū “girl” [BF] 5. nāng “murmur” [BF]
2. niē “pinch” 4. niān “pick up”

L
Like the l in English leaf but tenser (like French, German, or Spanish l). Mandarin l is produced by most speakers with the tip of the tongue in a slightly more forward position than in English.

Pronunciation Exercise A-8
1. lƗ “pull” 3. lƝ “tighten” 5. lǀ “gather up”
2. lƗ “sh for” 4. li “sneak out” 6. lu “talkative” [BF]

G
Like the k in English sky. It differs from English g as in go in that English g is voiced while Mandarin g is voiceless. First say sky, then hiss the s on sky like this: ssss. Finally, remove the s. The end result should be close to Mandarin gai.

Pronunciation Exercise A-9
1. gƝ “brother” 3. gƗ “tall” 5. gu “pot” 7. guƗ “plough”
2. gƗ “should” 4. guƗ “well-behaved” 6. guƗ “print”

K
Like the k in English kite but with a stronger puff of breath. Similar to the ck plus the following h in English black hole.

Pronunciation Exercise A-10
1. kƗ “harsh” 3. kƲ “open” 5. ku “lose” 7. ku “plough”
2. kű “cry” 4. ku “boast” 6. kǖn “print” 8. kǑ “empty”

H
Initial h sounds like the h in English hand but is pronounced with more friction so that it sounds rougher, like German ch in Loch “hole” or Spanish j in mujer “woman.” There is some variation in the amount of friction depending on the speaker.

Pronunciation Exercise A-11
1. Há (surname) 3. hē “black” 5. hu “ashes” 7. hǹg “hum”
2. hē “drink” 4. hu “flower” 6. hūn “faint” 8. hu “panic”

J
Like the j in English jeep but unvoiced and with the middle part of the tongue pressed tightly against the roof of the mouth. There is more friction in Mandarin than in English. Though the lips are always rounded in English, they are rounded in Mandarin only in front of u, being spread before the other vowels. Say the Biblical pronoun ye, then pronounce j as in jeep at the same time as ye, all the while pressing your tongue tightly against the roof of your mouth.

Pronunciation Exercise A-12
1. jƗ “chicken” 2. jǖ “dwell” 3. jiā “home”
Figure 2: The Four Tones of Mandarin

In these diagrams, the vertical dimension stands for pitch, with the top of each diagram slightly above the normal pitch range in English and the bottom slightly below. The horizontal dimension stands for duration, with the thickness of the tone curve representing loudness.

**Pronunciation Exercise A-60**

1. **gǒu** “dog”  
2. **hǎo** “good”  
3. **jǐn** “tight”  
4. **mà** “horse”  
5. **nǐ** “you”  
6. **qīng** “invite”  
7. **wān** “bowl”  
8. **zhàng** “grow”

**TONE FOUR: HIGH FALLING**

Tone Four starts at the top of the voice range and falls sharply to the bottom, diminishing in loudness as it falls. It has shorter than average length. Tone Four is indicated by a falling mark over the main vowel of the syllable:  ü. Be sure to start Tone Four high enough and let it fall all the way down. In English, we often use this intonation in imperatives such as “Quick!” or when emphatically answering a ridiculous question with “No!”.

**Pronunciation Exercise A-61**

1. **bào** “newspaper”  
2. **èr** “two”  
3. **gèng** “even more”  
4. **mà** “scold”  
5. **shì** “be”  
6. **wàn** “10,000”  
7. **xìn** “letter”  
8. **xìng** “surname”

**NEUTRAL TONE**

In normal Mandarin conversation, there is a fairly large number of unstressed syllables which are spoken in a weak and hurried manner and which have no discernible tone of their own. Such syllables, which bear no tone mark of any kind, are commonly referred to as being in the “neutral tone.” Although you need not remember this, we will list here for your future reference the types of syllables which are typically in the neutral tone, along with some examples:

1. sentence final particles (a, ba, ne)
2. verb suffixes (-guo, -le, -zhe)
3. noun and pronoun suffixes (mùtou “wood,” zhuōzi “table,” wǒmen “we”)
4. suffixes on question words and adverbs (duōme “how,” shénme “what,” zèmme “so”)
5. reduplicated syllables (kànkàn “look”)
6. resultative complements (dàkài “open,” jìnqu “go in”)
7. infix syllables (shuòyishuò “say,” tīngbudōng “can’t understand”)
8. localizers (dǐshang “on the ground,” jǐlǐ “at home”)
9. the second syllable of kinship terms (dìdì “younger brother,” jíjié “older sister,” shūshu “uncle”)
10. pronoun objects (jiào ta huílai “tell her to return”)

In addition, there is a rather large number of common colloquial words in which the second syllable is neutral tone. In this text, all neutral tones will be so indicated. You should learn neutral tone syllables as you learn the words in which they occur.
Neutral tones are to some extent used in all dialects of Mandarin but are especially common in the speech of Beijing and other parts of North China. Speakers from southern China tend to use fewer neutral tones, especially as concerns the second syllable of two-syllable words. Use of neutral tones is also related to rate of speech and degree of formality. For example, more neutral tones would be used in an informal chat between close friends than in a formal lecture or when repeating something for someone who did not understand the first time. Or again, in the careful speech of a language teacher speaking to foreign students in the classroom, there would tend to be fewer neutral tones than when that same teacher returns to the office to chat with a Chinese colleague. Please bear this in mind if you notice discrepancies among the transcription, the audio recordings, and your instructor(s). While there are some cases where use of the neutral tone is mandatory (e.g., final particles), in many other cases it is optional. For your Chinese to sound fluent and natural, it is important for you to pay attention to and imitate the neutral tones in your instructor’s speech and the speech on the accompanying recordings.

Although neutral tone syllables have no tone, they do have pitch. The pitch of neutral tone syllables is influenced mainly by the tone of the preceding syllable, so it is important to notice the pitch positions of neutral tone syllables relative to the preceding tone (cf. Figure 3 below).

![Figure 3: Pitch of Neutral Tone Syllables](image)

Generally speaking, after Tone One, Tone Two, and Tone Four, a neutral tone syllable drops to a fairly low pitch. After Tone Three, a neutral tone syllable jumps up to a fairly high pitch. Remember that, unlike syllables in one of the regular four tones, neutral tone syllables are never stressed and always spoken very lightly. The pitch of neutral tones is also affected to some degree by the tone of the syllable that follows, which may move the neutral tone in the direction of the start of the following tone.

In neutral tone syllables, the normally voiceless initials b, d, and g are sometimes voiced. For example, the b in Zōu ba “Let’s go!” may sound like an English voiced b. The vowels of neutral tone syllables are shorter, laxer, and more centralized than in syllables with tones.

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**Pronunciation Exercise A-62: Tone One + Neutral Tone**
1. māma “mom”
2. shūō “has lost”
3. shuōzhe “talking”
4. tài “hers”
5. wūzi “room”
6. xiānshēng “mister”

**Pronunciation Exercise A-63: Tone Two + Neutral Tone**
1. bǐzi “nose”
2. láile “has come”
3. niánji “age”
4. péngyou “friend”
5. shéide “whose?”
6. Wáng jia “the Wangs”
Pronunciation and Romanization

Tones

Pronunciation Exercise A-64: Tone Three + Neutral Tone
1. hàode “O.K.”  3. liàngge “two of them”  5. yízì “chair”
2. hǎoma “O.K.?”  4. wūmen “we”  6. zōule “has gone”

Pronunciation Exercise A-65: Tone Four + Neutral Tone
1. lèile “has become tired”  3. qùba “let’s go”  5. shìde “yes”
2. mèimei “younger sister”  4. sìge “four of them”  6. zhànzhe “standing”

TONE CHANGES
When certain tones occur directly before certain other tones, their tones change in fairly predictable ways. Although this may seem difficult and confusing at first, you will get used to these changes within a few weeks and they will soon become automatic for you. There are three major tone changes:

1. When a Tone Three syllable occurs directly before a syllable in Tone One, Tone Two, Tone Four or before most neutral tones, it loses its final rise and remains low throughout. The changed tone is then called a Half Tone Three. Note that in terms of overall frequency of occurrence, the Half Tone Three is actually more common than the unchanged, full Tone Three, which normally occurs only in isolation or at the end of a sentence or phrase followed by a pause. Thus it is very important that students pronounce Half Tone Three correctly.

Pronunciation Exercise A-66: Half Tone Three
1. māi + shū = māi shū “buy books”
2. māi + xié = māi xié “buy shoes”
3. māi + cāi = māi cāi “buy groceries”
4. māi + le = māile “has bought”

2. When a Tone Three syllable occurs directly before another Tone Three syllable, the first Tone Three syllable changes to Tone Two. It is then called a Raised Tone Three.*

Pronunciation Exercise A-67: Raised Tone Three
1. hén + lǎo = hén lǎo “very old”
2. gàn + jīn = gànjīn “quickly”
3. māi + bì = māi bì “buy pens”
4. nǐ + hào = nǐ hào “how are you”

3. In the speech of many speakers, when two Tone Four syllables follow each other in close succession, the first receives lighter stress than the second. The tone of the first Tone Four syllable often does not fall all the way to the bottom of the pitch range but only to the middle. It is then called a Half Tone Four.

Pronunciation Exercise A-68: Half Tone Four
1. dā + gài = dāgài “probably”
2. guī + xīng = guīxīng “what’s your last name?”
3. tài + kuài = tài kuài “too fast”
4. zài + jiàn = zàijiàn “goodbye”

* When three or more Tone Three syllables come together in succession, the last syllable remains Tone Three, the next to last syllable changes to Tone Two, and the preceding Tone Three syllable(s) may either remain Tone Three or change to Tone Two depending on the speaker’s preference and various grammatical and semantic factors. For example, wǒ yě mǎi “I’ll also buy” could be either Tone Three + Tone Two + Tone Three or Tone Two + Tone Two + Tone Three. On the other hand, lèng shuǐ zào “cold water bath” can be only Tone Two + Tone Two + Tone Three, since it derives from the word for “cold water.”
The (r) Suffix

In the dialect of Beijing and many other Northern Chinese dialects, and to a lesser extent in standard Mandarin, some words end in a suffixed (r) which is attached to the ends of the finals listed previously. The (r) suffix may cause modifications in the vowels and consonants of those finals.

The (r) suffix sounds like the -r at the end of the Mandarin final -er, or much like the English word are. To pronounce the (r) suffix, draw back the tongue, at the same time turning the tip of the tongue upwards. The (r) suffix is always pronounced as part of the last syllable, not separately as a syllable of its own, even though in standard written Chinese it is written separately with its own character.†

The rules for pronouncing the (r) suffix finals are as follows:‡

A. After a, ao, e, ia, iao, iu, o, ou, ua, uo, and u (except when u occurs after j, q, x, y): add -r.

Pronunciation Exercise A-69
1. nà “that” → nár “there”
2. xiàodào → xiàodăor “small knife”
3. kàn yixia → kàn yixiar “take a look”
4. niăo → niăor “bird”
5. dàqū → dàqūr “play ball”
6. shānpō → shānpōr “mountain slope”
7. xiàotōu → xiàotōur “thief”
8. huà “paint” → huàr “painting”
9. xiāoshuō → xiāoshuōr “novel”
10. báitù → báitūr “white rabbit”

B. After u (when u occurs after j, q, x, y) and after i (except when i occurs after c, ch, s, sh, z, zh): add -er.

Pronunciation Exercise A-70
1. jīnjū → jīnjůr “kumquat”
2. yǒuqū → yǒuqūr “interesting”
3. yú → yúr “fish”
4. xiāojī → xiāojīr “chick”
5. xiāomī → xiāomîr “millet”
6. pǐ → pîr “skin (of fruit)”

C. After i (when i occurs after c, ch, s, sh, z, zh): drop i and add -er.

Pronunciation Exercise A-71
1. ci → cir “thorn”
2. jūchī → jūchîr “tooth of a saw”
3. rōusī → rōusîr “meat shreds”
4. méi shì → méi shîr “never mind”
5. guāzī → guāzîr “watermelon seed”
6. guōzhī → guōzhîr “fruit juice”

* There is some variation in the formation of the (r) suffix, depending on the subdialect of Mandarin spoken and the age of the speaker. Subtle differences in usage exist even from one district of Beijing to the next. For some speakers, there are differences depending on the tone of a syllable. However, these differences are all minor and relatively unimportant.
† The rules are given here for future reference. It is not necessary that you learn them; instead, learn words with the (r) suffix as they are introduced throughout the course. You will not be tested on your ability to pronounce the (r) suffix in isolation from the various basic syllables.

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5. xìn "letter", xìng "surname"
6. yìn "print", yīng "hard"
7. bú xìn "not believe", bú xìng "unfortunate"
8. hēn jìn "very close", hēn jīng "very still"
9. pīnfān "frequent", pīngfān "ordinary"
10. rénmín "people", rénmíng "person's name"

Pronunciation Exercise B-72: ang vs. eng
1. bàng "great", bèng "jump"
2. fàng "put", fèng "crack"
3. māng "python" [BF], Měng "Mongolian" [BF]
4. pàng "fat", pèng "bump"
5. ràng "shout", rèng "throw away"
6. dōngfāng "the east", dōngfēng "east wind"
7. mǎngzhe "being busy", měngzhe "covering"

Pronunciation Exercise B-73: ang vs. eng vs. ong
1. cáng "hide", céng "level", cóng "from"
2. chăng "long", chéng "O.K.", chóng "bug"
3. dăng "party", dēng "wait", dōng "understand"
4. găng "just", gēng "plough" [BF], gǒng "supply"
5. hăng "line", héng "horizontal", hóng "red"
6. kāng "health" [BF], kēng "pit", kǒng "empty"
7. lǎng "wolf", lêng "edge" [BF], lóng "cage" [BF]
8. tǎng "sugar", têng "hurt", tóng "same"

Pronunciation Exercises, Part C: English-Chinese Contrastive Pronunciation

There are a number of Chinese sounds which students often confuse with certain English sounds that, to the non-Chinese ear, may sound somewhat similar. It is important to be aware of the differences between the Chinese and English sounds and to pronounce the Chinese sounds as accurately as possible. The exercises in this section will give you practice in contrasting some of these frequently confused sounds. In the exercises below, English words will be enclosed in quotation marks with Chinese words or syllables, as before, in bold print.

Pronunciation Exercise C-1: English "b" vs. Chinese b
Remember that Chinese b is voiceless while English initial "b" is voiced.
1. "bay", bèi "by"
2. "bin", bīn "guest" [BF]
3. "boo", bù "not"
4. "bow", bào "embrace"
5. "bye", bài "defeat" [BF]

Pronunciation Exercise C-2: English "d" vs. Chinese d
Remember that Chinese d is voiceless while English initial "d" is voiced.
1. "D", dì "give"
2. "day", dēi "must"
3. "dew", Dù (surname)
# Abbreviations

## Word Classes*

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## Other Abbreviations and Symbols

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* For explanations of the word classes, see the section on “Word Classes of Spoken Chinese” at the end of this volume.