

Phonetics

I. Initials

b	p	m	f	d	t	n	l	g	k	h
j	q	x	z	c	s	zh	ch	sh	r	

II. Finals

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

III. Notes

j: is similar to “jee” in “jeep”.

q: is similar to “ch” in “cheese”.

x: is similar to “sh” in “sheet”.

z: is similar to “ds” in “beds”.

c: is similar to “ts” in “cats”.

s: is similar to “s” in “hens”.

zh: is similar to “j” in “job”.

ch: is similar to “ch” in “chair”.

sh: is similar to “sh” in “fish”.

r: is similar to “r” in “rain”.

e: is similar to “er” in “her” (English accent).

ü: no English equivalent.

ie: is similar to “ye” in “yes”.

er: is similar to “er” in “sister” (American accent).

IV. Pronunciation

The pronunciation of almost all Chinese characters is a combination of initials and finals.

Example: b+a=ba n+e=ne j+ia=jia r+ang=rang sh+uai=shuai

1. Tones

The Chinese language is based on tones. It has four basic tones: the first tone (ˉ) is a flat high tone, the second tone (ˊ) moves from low to high, the third tone (ˇ) moves down low from high and rises high again, and the fourth tone (ˋ) moves from high to low.

In putonghua, some finals are pronounced both light and short; such a tone is called the neutral tone.

Example: mā, má, mǎ, mà, ma.

Where are the indication of tones placed?

- (1) If there is “a”, the tone indicator is written on top of “a” .
- (2) Without “a”, the tone indicator is written on top of “o” or “e”.
- (3) If there are both “i” and “u”, the tone indicator is written on top of the latter.
- (4) If the final is just one letter, the tone indicator will appear on that letter.

2. Change of tones

A third tone, when immediately followed by another third tone, should be pronounced as a second tone.

Example: nǐ hǎo ⇒ ní hǎo

3. Change of tones of 不 and 一

不 and 一 will be pronounced in the second tone if immediately followed by a fourth tone or a neutral tone.

不 and 一 will be pronounced in the fourth tone if immediately followed by a first tone, second tone

or third tone.

Example: bú xiè bú shì bù xīn bù lái bù hǎo
yí kuài yí ge yì tiān yì nián yìqǐ

4. Retroflex final with -r

“er” is often added to another final to make it a retroflex. The retroflex final is transcribed by adding “r” to the original final.

Example: wánr huār

5. The dividing mark

When a syllable beginning with a, o or e is attached to another syllable, it is desirable to use the dividing mark ’ to clarify the boundary between the two syllables.

Example: nǚ’ér

6. Notes on spelling

zi ci si	=	z c s
zhi chi shi	=	zh ch sh
ju jue juan jun	=	jü jüe jüan jün
qu que quan qun	=	qü qüe qüan qün
xu xue xuan xun	=	xü xüe xüan xün
yu yue yuan yun	=	ü üe üan ün
ya ye yao you	=	ia ie iao iou
yi yan yin ying yang	=	i ian in ing iang
yong	=	iong
wu wa wo wai wei	=	u ua uo uai uei
wan wen wang weng	=	uan uen uang ueng

Characters

I. Strokes

Although there are many Chinese characters, there are only about 20 kinds of strokes used to create them. Among these however, it is only necessary to learn the following eight strokes, and to view the others as their variants.

一 (横, horizontal)	丨 (竖, vertical)	丿 (撇, left-falling)
㇇ (捺, right-falling)	㇇ (折, turning)	㇇ ㇇ 乙 (钩, hook)
丶 (点, dot)	㇇ (提, rising)	

II. The structure of characters

Structurally Chinese characters can be classified into two groups: one-component characters and combined characters.

1. **One-component characters** have only one basic part and cannot be subdivided. They can be further categorized into pictograms and indicative characters.

(1) Pictograms

Pictograms represent the objects they refer to in stylized forms:

人 person	木 tree	口 mouth	日 sun	月 moon
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(2) Indicative characters

The combination of strokes can show an abstract meaning:

上 above	中 among	下 under
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2. **Combined characters** are composed of two or more parts and can be further categorized into associative compounds and phono-semantic compounds.

(1) Associative compounds

Associative characters are formed through the combination of two or more meaningful components to