

Rules given in terms of English pronunciation

All rules given here in terms of English pronunciation are approximate, as several of these sounds do not correspond directly to sounds in English.

Pronunciation of initials

Pinyin	IPA	Explanation
<i>b</i>	[p]	unaspirated p , as in spit
<i>p</i>	[p ^h]	strongly aspirated p , as in pit
<i>m</i>	[m]	as in English mom
<i>f</i>	[f]	as in English fun
<i>d</i>	[t]	unaspirated t , as in stop
<i>t</i>	[t ^h]	strongly aspirated t , as in top
<i>n</i>	[n]	as in English nit
<i>l</i>	[l]	as in English love
<i>g</i>	[k]	unaspirated k , as in skill
<i>k</i>	[k ^h]	strongly aspirated k , as in kill
<i>h</i>	[x]	like the English h if followed by "a"; otherwise it is pronounced more roughly (like the Scots ch or Russian x (Cyrillic "kha")).
<i>j</i>	[tɕ]	like <i>q</i> , but unaspirated. Not unlike the j in jingle . Not the s in Asia , despite the common English pronunciation of "Beijing".
<i>q</i>	[tɕ ^h]	like cheek , with the lips spread as when you say <i>ee</i> . Strongly aspirated.
<i>x</i>	[ɕ]	like she , with the lips spread as when you say <i>ee</i> . The sequence "xi" is like Japanese し <i>shi</i> .
<i>zh</i>	[ts]	ch with no aspiration (a sound between joke and church , tongue tip curled more upwards); very similar to merger in American English, but not voiced
<i>ch</i>	[ts ^h]	as in chin , but with the tongue curled upwards; very similar to nurture in American English, but strongly aspirated
<i>sh</i>	[s]	as in shoe , but with the tongue curled upwards; very similar to marsh in American English
<i>r</i>	[ʐ]	Similar to the English z in azure , but with the tongue curled upwards, like a cross between English "r" and French "j". In Cyrillised Chinese the sound is rendered with the letter "ж".
<i>z</i>	[ts]	unaspirated c (something between suds and cats)
<i>c</i>	[ts ^h]	like ts in bats , but strongly aspirated
<i>s</i>	[s]	as in sun
<i>w</i>	[w]	as in water .*
<i>y</i>	[j]	as in yes .*
'	[.]	new syllable*

* Note on *w*, *y*, and the apostrophe

Y and *w* are equivalent to the semivowel medials *i*, *u*, and *ü* (see below). They are spelled differently when there is no initial consonant in order to mark a new syllable: *fanguan* is *fan-guan*, while *fangwan* is *fang-wan* (and equivalent to **fang-uan*). With this convention, an apostrophe only needs to be used to mark an initial *a*, *e*, or *o*:

Xi'an (two syllables: [çi.an]) vs. *xian* (one syllable: [çiɛn]). In addition, *y* and *w* are added to fully vocalic *i*, *u*, and *ü* when these occur without an initial consonant, so that they are written *yi*, *wu*, and *yu*. Some Mandarin speakers do pronounce a [j] or [w] sound at the beginning of such words—that is, *yi* [i] or [ji], *wu* [u] or [wu], *yu* [y] or [ʷy],—so this is an intuitive convention. See below for a few finals which are abbreviated after a consonant plus *w/u* or *y/i* medial: *wen* → C+*un*, *wei* → C+*ui*, *weng* → C+*ong*, and *you* → C+*iu*.

Pronunciation of finals

The following is an exhaustive list of all finals in Standard Mandarin. Those ending with a final **-r** are listed at the end.

To find a given final:

1. Remove the initial consonant. *Zh*, *ch*, and *sh* count as initial consonants.
2. Change initial *w* to *u* and initial *y* to *i*. For *weng*, *wei*, *you*, look under *ong*, *ui*, *iu*.
3. For *u* after *j*, *q*, *x*, or *y*, look under *ü*.

Pinyin	IPA	Form with zero initial	Explanation
-i	[ɿ], [ʅ]	n/a	-i is a buzzed continuation of the consonant following <i>z</i> -, <i>c</i> -, <i>s</i> -, <i>zh</i> -, <i>ch</i> -, <i>sh</i> - or <i>r</i> -. (In all other words, -i has the sound of bee; this is listed below.)
<i>a</i>	[ɑ]	a	as in "father"
<i>o</i>	[ʊɔ]	o	starts with English "oo" and ends with a plain continental "o".
<i>e</i>	[ɤ], [ə]	e	a back, unrounded vowel, which can be formed by first pronouncing a plain continental "o" (AuE and NZE law) and then spreading the lips without changing the position of the tongue. That same sound is also similar to English "duh", but not as open. Many unstressed syllables in Chinese use the schwa (idea), and this is also written as <i>e</i> .
<i>ê</i>	[ɛ]	(n/a)	as in "bet". Only used in certain interjections.
<i>ai</i>	[aɪ]	ai	like English "eye", but a bit lighter
<i>ei</i>	[eɪ]	ei	as in "hey"
<i>ao</i>	[ɑʊ]	ao	approximately as in "cow"; the <i>a</i> is much more audible than the <i>o</i>
<i>ou</i>	[ou]	ou	as in "so"
<i>an</i>	[an]	an	starts with plain continental "a" (AuE and NZE bud) and ends with "n"
<i>en</i>	[ən]	en	as in "taken"
<i>ang</i>	[ɑŋ]	ang	as in German <i>Angst</i> , including the English loan word <i>angst</i> (starts with the vowel sound in father and ends in the velar nasal; like <i>song</i> in American English)
<i>eng</i>	[ɤŋ]	eng	like <i>e</i> above but with <i>ng</i> added to it at the back
<i>ong</i>	[ʊŋ]	weng	starts with the vowel sound in <i>book</i> and ends with the velar nasal sound in <i>sing</i>
<i>er</i>	[ɑɹ]	er	as in "butter"
Finals beginning with i- (y-)			
<i>i</i>	[i]	yi	like English bee.
<i>ia</i>	[iɑ]	ya	as <i>i</i> + <i>a</i> ; like English "yard"

<i>io</i>	[iɔ]	yo	as i + plain continental "o" . Only used in certain interjections.
<i>ie</i>	[iɛ]	ye	as i + ê ; but is very short; <i>e</i> (pronounced like <i>ê</i>) is pronounced longer and carries the main stress (similar to the initial sound <i>ye</i> in <i>yet</i>)
<i>iao</i>	[iaɔ]	yao	as i + ao
<i>iu</i>	[iou]	you	as i + ou
<i>ian</i>	[iɛn]	yan	as i + ê + n ; like English <i>yen</i>
<i>in</i>	[in]	yin	as i + n
<i>iang</i>	[iɑŋ]	yang	as i + ang
<i>ing</i>	[iŋ]	ying	as i but with <i>ng</i> added to it at the back
<i>iong</i>	[iɔŋ]	yong	as yu + ong

Finals beginning with u- (w-)

<i>u</i>	[u]	wu	like English "oo"; pronounced as <i>ü</i> [y] after j, q, x and y
<i>ua</i>	[uɑ]	wa	as u + a
<i>uo</i>	[uɔ]	wo	as u + o ; the <i>o</i> is pronounced shorter and lighter than in the <i>o</i> final
<i>uai</i>	[uɑi]	wai	as u + ai like as in <i>why</i>
<i>ui</i>	[uɛi]	wei	as u + ei ; here, the <i>i</i> is pronounced like <i>ei</i>
<i>uan</i>	[uɑn]	wan	as u + an ; pronounced as <i>üan</i> [yɛn] after j, q, x and y
<i>un</i>	[uɔn]	wen	as u + en ; like the <i>on</i> in the English <i>won</i> ; pronounced as <i>ün</i> [yn] after j, q, x and y
<i>uang</i>	[uɑŋ]	wang	as u + ang ; like the <i>ang</i> in English <i>angst</i> or <i>anger</i>
<i>ong</i>	[uɔŋ]	weng	as u + eng

Finals beginning with ü- (yu-)

<i>u, ü</i>	[y]	yu	as in German "üben" or French "lune" (To get this sound, say "ee" with rounded lips)
<i>ue, üe</i>	[yɛ]	yue	as ü + ê ; the <i>ü</i> is short and light
<i>uan</i>	[yɛn]	yuan	as ü + ê + n ;
<i>un, ün</i>	[yn]	yun	as ü + n ;

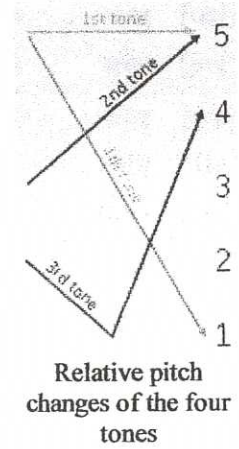
MEASURE WORDS

Measure words are a special feature of Chinese and many other Asian languages, connecting numerals to nouns. The most common measure words are:

ba3 (bah) -chairs, knives, teapots, tools or implements with handles, stems, bunches of flowers	pan2 (pahn) -round objects
bei1 (bay) -cups, glasses	suo3 (swor) -buildings
ben3 (bun) -books, magazines	tiao2 (tyow) -fish and various long narrow things
feng1 (fun) -letters	wei4 (way) -polite measure word used for gentlemen, ladies, guests, etc.
ge4 (gur) -a general measure word for nouns that do not have special measure words, or in default of any other measure word	zhang1 (jahng) -tables, beds, tickets, sheets of paper
jian4 (jyen) -things, affairs, shirts, etc.	zhi1 (jur) -animals, birds, hands, suitcases, boats
ke1 (kür) -trees	
kuai4 (kwai) -lumps, piece	
liang4 (lyang) -vehicles	

Tones

The pinyin system also uses diacritics to mark the four tones of Mandarin. The diacritic is placed over the letter that represents the syllable nucleus, unless that letter is missing (see below). Many books printed in China use a mix of fonts, with vowels and tone marks rendered in a different font than the surrounding text, tending to give such pinyin texts a typographically ungainly appearance. This style, most likely rooted in early technical limitations, has led many to believe that pinyin's rules call for this practice and also for the use of a Latin alpha ("ɑ") rather than the standard style of the letter ("a") found in most fonts. The official rules of *Hanyu Pinyin*, however, specify no such practice.



1. The first tone (Flat or High Level Tone) is represented by a macron (ˉ) added to the pinyin vowel:

ā (ɑ̄) ē ī ō ū ũ Ā Ē Ī Ō Ū Ũ

2. The second tone (Rising or High-Rising Tone) is denoted by an acute accent (ˇ):

á (ɑ́) é í ó ú ũ Á É Í Ó Ú Ũ

3. The third tone (Falling-Rising or Low Tone) is marked by a caron/háček (ˇ). It is not the rounded breve (˘), though a breve is sometimes substituted due to font limitations.

ǎ (ɑǎ) ě ĭ ǒ ǔ ǔ Ā Ē Ī Ō Ū Ũ

4. The fourth tone (Falling or High-Falling Tone) is represented by a grave accent (`):

à (ɑ̀) è ì ò ù ù À È Ì Ò Ù Û

5. The fifth tone (Neutral Tone) is represented by a normal vowel without any accent mark:

a (ɑ) e i o u ü A E I O U Ü

(In some cases, this is also written with a dot before the syllable; for example, ·ma.)

These tone marks normally are only used in Mandarin textbooks or in foreign learning texts, but they are essential for correct pronunciation of Mandarin syllables, as exemplified by the following classic example of five characters whose pronunciations differ only in their tones:

Traditional characters:

媽_(mā) 麻_(má) 馬_(mǎ) 罵_(mà) 嗎_(·ma)

Simplified characters:

妈_(mā) 麻_(má) 马_(mǎ) 骂_(mà) 吗_(·ma)

The words are "mother", "hemp", "horse", "scold" and a question particle, respectively.