

Beginner Pronunciation Sheet

Your first clear reference for Mandarin pronunciation

What this sheet is for

This is **not** a full pronunciation chart. It is a calm, beginner-friendly reference that helps you review the most important ideas from your first Mandarin lessons.

Use it when you need a quick reminder of:

- what pinyin is
- how a Mandarin syllable works
- how the four tones feel
- which spellings often confuse beginners

The goal is not perfection. The goal is familiarity.

Pinyin: a quick reminder

Pinyin is the system used to write **Standard Mandarin pronunciation** with the Roman alphabet.

It is a guide to sound. It is **not English spelling**.

Key idea

Do not guess from English. Listen first.

The basic structure of a Mandarin syllable

A Mandarin syllable often has three parts:

- **Initial** — the opening sound
- **Final** — the vowel part or ending
- **Tone** — the pitch pattern

Simple formula

Initial + Final + Tone

Examples

- mā
- nǐ

- hǎo
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The four tones

Tone	Feeling	Quick cue
First tone	High and level	steady
Second tone	Rising	goes up
Third tone	Lower and curved	dips down
Fourth tone	Falling	drops sharply

Quick listening reminder

- steady
 - rising
 - lower / curved
 - falling
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Common beginner traps

These spellings may look familiar to English speakers, but they do **not** sound the English way.

- **q** — a soft sound, not English “kw”
- **x** — a light front sound, not English “x”
- **zh** — a Mandarin sound family of its own
- **c** — closer to “ts” than English “c”
- **ü** — a sound many beginners need time to hear and produce

Key reminder

Familiar letters do not always mean familiar sounds.

What to focus on first

1. **Hear the sound**
Train your ear before worrying about perfect speech.
 2. **Notice the tone direction**
Listen for steady, rising, curved, or falling movement.
 3. **Learn in small groups**
Do not try to memorize every pinyin spelling at once.
 4. **Repeat often**
Short, repeated practice works better than one long session.
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Beginner practice checklist

Use this sheet to ask yourself:

- Can I explain what pinyin is?
- Can I hear that Mandarin uses tones?
- Can I recognize the four basic tone directions?
- Can I remember that pinyin is not English spelling?
- Can I repeat a few simple syllables slowly?

If the answer is **not yet**, that is completely normal. This sheet is here to support repetition.

Final encouragement

Mandarin pronunciation may feel unfamiliar at first, but it is not random. It has patterns.

If you listen carefully, practice in small steps, and return often to the basics, your ear will grow stronger.

Start with recognition. Clarity will come with repetition.