SAYMEI · EVERYDAY CHINESE · CHEAT SHEET

How to Say Idiot in Chinese

Idiot is 笨蛋 (bèndàn). Between friends it's teasing; in a fight it's an insult. Here's how hard each word lands, the kinder ways to disagree, and what to say back. Harsher insults exist, and this page leaves them out.



笨蛋 **bèndàn** Idiot, dummy

Sounds like bun-dahn. bèn falls: 4th tone, dàn falls: 4th tone. If someone calls you one as a joke: 你才笨呢 (nǐ cái bèn ne), You're the dummy.

Which one fits?

Your own mistake	哎呀，我真笨！ Āiyā, wǒ zhēn bèn! Oops, I'm such an idiot!
Teasing a partner	你这个小傻瓜。 Nǐ zhège xiǎo shǎguā. You silly thing.
A friend's silly joke	笨蛋！ Bèndàn! Dummy!
A friend's bad idea	别犯傻了！ Bié fàn shǎ le! Don't be silly!
A colleague's plan	这样可能不太好。 Zhèyàng kěnéng bú tài hǎo. That might not be a great idea.

12 ways to say idiot in Chinese, from kind to harsh

●○○ gentle · ●●○ blunt · ●●● harsh

KINDER: ABOUT THE IDEA, OR ABOUT YOURSELF

我真笨 wǒ zhēn bèn I'm such an idiot ●○○

你想多了 nǐ xiǎng duō le You're overthinking it ●○○

别犯傻 bié fàn shǎ Don't be silly ●○○

这样不太好 zhèyàng bú tài hǎo That's not a great idea ●○○

TEASING: COUPLES AND CLOSE FRIENDS

小笨蛋 xiǎo bèndàn Silly, little dummy ●○○

傻瓜 shǎguā Fool, silly ●○○

BLUNT: CALLING SOMEONE AN IDIOT

笨蛋 bèndàn Idiot, dummy ●●○

笨 bèn Slow, clumsy ●●○

傻子 shǎzi Fool, idiot ●●○

HARSH: REAL INSULTS

白痴 báichī Moron ●●●

蠢 chǔn Stupid ●●●

蠢货 chǔnhuò Stupid idiot ●●●

What to say if someone calls you an idiot

你才笨呢 nǐ cái bèn ne You're the dummy ●○○

别这么说 bié zhème shuō Don't say that EVERYDAY

我错了 wǒ cuò le I was wrong EVERYDAY

BETWEEN FRIENDS

A: 你又忘带钥匙了？笨蛋！ Nǐ yòu wàng dài yàoshi le? Bèndàn! You forgot your keys again? Dummy!

B: 你才笨呢！ Nǐ cái bèn ne! You're the dummy!

A COUPLE

A: 我给你做了早饭。 Wǒ gěi nǐ zuò le zǎofàn. I made you breakfast.

B: 傻瓜，你应该多睡一会儿。 Shǎguā, nǐ yīnggāi duō shuì yíhuìr. You silly thing, you should have slept in.

WHEN IT WASN'T A JOKE

A: 你真是个白痴。 Nǐ zhēn shì ge báichī. You're a real moron.

B: 别这么说。 Bié zhème shuō. Don't talk to me like that.

What to avoid, and why

- × Don't call a colleague, a teacher, a stranger or an older relative 笨蛋 (bèndàn), even as a joke. Teasing words only work inside a close relationship.
- × Don't use 傻子 (shǎzi) or 白痴 (báichī) about people with disabilities, even in passing. Both have been used as slurs.
- × Don't call a child 笨 (bèn) when they struggle with homework. Many parents now avoid it. Say 慢慢来 (màn màn lái), take your time.

Hear every phrase and take the quiz: **saymei.app/tools/idiot-in-chinese**

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