



PRONUNCIATION • STARTER

Mandarin Pronunciation Map for English Speakers

See how pinyin syllables are built, map the four tones and neutral tone, and practice the Mandarin sound contrasts that most often surprise English speakers.

mā / má / mǎ / mà / ma

妈 / 麻 / 马 / 骂 / 吗

mother / hemp / horse / scold / question particle

The same syllable shape carries five different tone patterns.

By the end, you can...

- ✓ Split a written pinyin syllable into initial, final, and tone
- ✓ Identify the contour represented by each tone mark
- ✓ Use airflow rather than English-style voicing to contrast b/p, d/t, and g/k



Starter

60–90 minutes across several short sessions

30 pages

Answer guide

Self-contained print practice. Audio and web tools are optional.



1

How a pinyin syllable works

After this page, you can Read pinyin as a sound map rather than as English spelling.

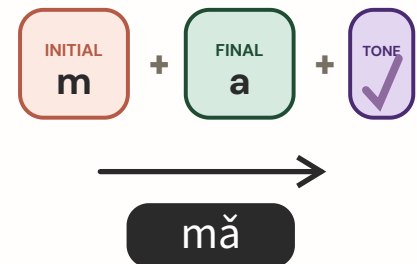
SPLIT

Initial + final + tone

Most pinyin syllables can be understood as an optional initial consonant plus a final, with a tone over the vowel: m + a + third tone = mǎ. Some syllables begin directly with a vowel sound. Pinyin letters do not promise their usual English sounds: q, x, c, and the i in zi are important examples.

Put it in your own words.

Cover this card and explain the idea in one sentence.



A visual anchor for this page's idea



2

How a pinyin syllable works CONTINUED

After this page, you can Read pinyin as a sound map rather than as English spelling.

SPLIT

Take the syllable apart

Pinyin	Initial	Final	Tone	Hanzi and meaning
mā	m	a	1st	妈 · mother
hǎo	h	ao	3rd	好 · good
qù	q	ü written u after q	4th	去 · go
ài	none	ai	4th	爱 · love
men	m	en	neutral	们 · plural suffix



Find, cover, recall

Find one useful row. Cover it and reconstruct the target form before checking.



3

Map the five tone patterns

After this page, you can Connect each tone mark with a pitch movement and a physical gesture.

 TRACE

Tone map

Tone	Mark	Movement	Practice cue
1st	ā	High and level	Hold your hand level near eye height
2nd	á	Rise from mid to high	Lift your hand as if asking 'Really?'
3rd	ǎ	Stay low; a full form dips then rises	Lower your hand; do not force a rise in every word
4th	à	Fall sharply from high to low	Drop your hand decisively
Neutral	a	Short and light; pitch depends on context	Make it brief, not whispered



Find, cover, recall

Find one useful row. Cover it and reconstruct the target form before checking.



4

Map the five tone patterns CONTINUED

After this page, you can Connect each tone mark with a pitch movement and a physical gesture.

 **TRACE**

Read the mark

Write the tone number or N for neutral.

1

WORKED EXAMPLE

mā

One answer **1**

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

2

má

**One more from you**

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



5

Map the five tone patterns CONTINUED

After this page, you can Connect each tone mark with a pitch movement and a physical gesture.

 **TRACE**

Read the mark

Write the tone number or N for neutral.

3

mǎ

4

mà
_____

One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



6

Map the five tone patterns CONTINUED

After this page, you can Connect each tone mark with a pitch movement and a physical gesture.

 **TRACE**

Read the mark

Write the tone number or N for neutral.

5

ma
_____

One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



7

Feel the puff of air

After this page, you can Contrast three consonant pairs by aspiration instead of relying on English letter names.

oo FEEL

Less air versus more air

Hold a small strip of paper in front of your lips. The second sound in each pair should move it more.

1

bā / pā

八 / 趴

eight / lie prone

Same a final and first tone: b has little puff; p has more.

2

dào / tàò

到 / 套

arrive / set; suit

Same ao final and fourth tone: d has little puff; t has more.

3

gē / kē

哥 / 科

older brother / field; subject

Same e final and first tone: g has little puff; k has more.

**Cover + retrieve**

Choose one line. Hide it, say it once, then uncover and repair one detail.



8

Feel the puff of air

CONTINUED

After this page, you can Contrast three consonant pairs by aspiration instead of relying on English letter names.

 FEEL

Choose the airflow cue

Choose LITTLE or MORE for the expected puff of air.

6

WORKED EXAMPLE

bā



LITTLE



MORE

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

7

pā



LITTLE



MORE

8

dào



LITTLE



MORE

**One more from you**

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



9

Feel the puff of air

CONTINUED

After this page, you can Contrast three consonant pairs by aspiration instead of relying on English letter names.

 FEEL

Choose the airflow cue

Choose LITTLE or MORE for the expected puff of air.

9

tào

☐ LITTLE☐ MORE

10

gē

☐ LITTLE☐ MORE

11

kē

☐ LITTLE☐ MORE

One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



10

Keep three tongue families apart

After this page, you can Place the tongue intentionally for the three commonly confused pinyin rows.

PLACE

Front, middle, and raised-tip families

The English cues are approximate. Follow the tongue cue first.



Use the visual cue, then find the matching row.

Family	Tongue cue	Sound cue	Examples
j q x	Tongue blade high and forward; tip stays behind lower teeth	j and q resemble forward, light 'j/ch'; x resembles a very forward 'sh'	jī 鸡 · qī 七 · xī 西
z c s	Tongue tip near the back of upper front teeth	z ≈ 'ds'; c ≈ a puffed 'ts'; s ≈ English s	zǎo 早 · cài 菜 · sān 三
zh ch sh r	Raise or slightly curl the tongue tip toward the hard palate	zh/ch/sh are farther back than j/q/x; r has friction and is not English r	zhè 这 · chī 吃 · shì 是 · rén 人



Find, cover, recall

Find one useful row. Cover it and reconstruct the target form before checking.



11

Keep three tongue families apart CONTINUED

After this page, you can Place the tongue intentionally for the three commonly confused pinyin rows.

PLACE

Name the family

Write JQX, ZCS, or ZHCHSHR.

12

WORKED EXAMPLE

qī

One answer **JQX**

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

13

chī



One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



12

Keep three tongue families apart CONTINUED

After this page, you can Place the tongue intentionally for the three commonly confused pinyin rows.

 **PLACE**

Name the family

Write JQX, ZCS, or ZHCHSHR.

14

sān

15

xī
_____

One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



13

Keep three tongue families apart CONTINUED

After this page, you can Place the tongue intentionally for the three commonly confused pinyin rows.

 **PLACE**

Name the family

Write JQX, ZCS, or ZHCHSHR.

16

rén

17

zǎo
_____

One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



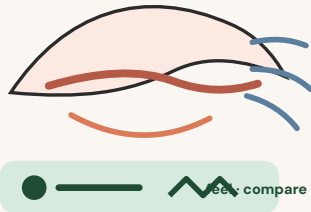
14

Repair the finals that English hides

After this page, you can Use lip shape and tongue position to distinguish high-value Mandarin finals.

SHAPE

Four practical final contrasts



Use the visual cue, then find the matching row.

Contrast	Mouth cue	Examples	Do not assume
u / ü	u: tongue back, lips round. ü: hold 'ee' tongue, then round lips	lù 路 / lǜ 绿	ü is not English 'oo'
i after j q x / i after zh ch sh r z c s	First is an 'ee'-like vowel; second continues the buzzing consonant posture	xī 西 / shì 是	Every written i has the same sound
-n / -ng	-n ends with tongue at the ridge; -ng ends with tongue back	jīn 今 / jīng 京	English spelling will keep them separate for you
e / uo (written wo without an initial)	e is central-to-back and unrounded; uo starts rounded and glides toward o	hē 喝 / wǒ 我	written wo is a plain o final



Find, cover, recall

Find one useful row. Cover it and reconstruct the target form before checking.



15

Repair the finals that English hides CONTINUED

After this page, you can Use lip shape and tongue position to distinguish high-value Mandarin finals.

 **SHAPE**

Use the mouth cue

Circle the pinyin that matches the instruction.

18

WORKED EXAMPLE

Hold an 'ee' tongue while rounding your lips.

☐ lù☒ lǔ

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

19

End with the back of the tongue raised.

☐ jīn☐ jīng

20

Keep the tongue posture from sh rather than saying 'ee'.

☐ shì☐ xī

21

Use rounded lips with the tongue farther back.

☐ lù☐ lǔ

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



16

Build and read whole syllables

After this page, you can Combine initial, final, and tone without reverting to English spelling rules.

 SAY

Say it, name what changed, say it again



bā / pà

八 / 怕

eight / fear

Change airflow and tone



jī / qī

鸡 / 七

chicken / seven

Keep tongue position; change airflow



xī / shì

西 / 是

west / be

Move from forward tongue blade to raised tongue tip



lù / lǜ

路 / 绿

road / green

Change tongue position while keeping rounded lips



Cover + retrieve

Choose one line. Hide it, say it once, then uncover and repair one detail.



17

Build and read whole syllables CONTINUED

After this page, you can Combine initial, final, and tone without reverting to English spelling rules.

SAY

Analyze before you say it

Write initial + final + tone number. Use NONE if there is no initial.

22

WORKED EXAMPLE

hǎo

One answer **h + ao + 3**

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

23

qù



One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



18

Build and read whole syllables CONTINUED

After this page, you can Combine initial, final, and tone without reverting to English spelling rules.

 **SAY**

Analyze before you say it

Write initial + final + tone number. Use NONE if there is no initial.

24

ài

25

rén



One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



19

Build and read whole syllables CONTINUED

After this page, you can Combine initial, final, and tone without reverting to English spelling rules.

 **SAY**

Analyze before you say it

Write initial + final + tone number. Use NONE if there is no initial.

26

lǔ

27

men
_____

One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



21

Detach this physical cue grid CONTINUED

After this page, you can Retrieve a mouth, tongue, or airflow action without treating an English keyword as the sound.

CUE

Spelling to physical action



Use the visual cue, then find the matching row.

Pinyin family	Do this	Original contrast set
u / ü	For u, keep the tongue back and lips rounded. For ü, keep an 'ee' tongue position while rounding the lips.	lù 路 / lǜ 绿
-n / -ng	For -n, touch the tongue near the ridge behind the upper teeth. For -ng, lift the back of the tongue instead.	jīn 今 / jīng 京
i after j/q/x vs. i after zh/ch/sh/r/z/c/s	After j/q/x, use an 'ee'-like vowel. After the other two families, keep the consonant tongue posture; do not add English 'ee'.	xī 西 / shī 师 zì 字 / jì 记



Find, cover, recall

Find one useful row. Cover it and reconstruct the target form before checking.



22

Detach this physical cue grid CONTINUED

After this page, you can Retrieve a mouth, tongue, or airflow action without treating an English keyword as the sound.

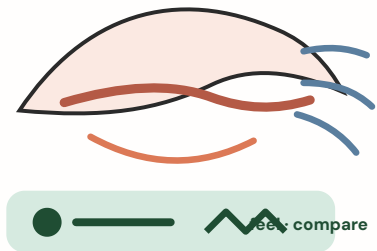
 **CUE**

Approximation only

This grid is a physical starting map, not a pronunciation guarantee. Detach it if useful, but calibrate each action with Mandarin audio and informed feedback. The example meanings help memory; they do not make the sounds interchangeable with English words.

Put it in your own words.

Cover this card and explain the idea in one sentence.



A visual anchor for this page's idea



23

Make a personal repair map

After this page, you can Choose a bounded set for feedback and later retrieval.

 REPAIR

My two priority contrasts

28

Choose two contrasts from this workbook. For each, write the tongue/lip/airflow cue, two example syllables, and one date to try them again without looking.

Success looks like Any two distinct contrasts with a physical cue, examples, and a future cold-practice date are acceptable.

Choose your mode Write in Hanzi · write in tone-marked pinyin · say and record it



24

Check your work

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

1

mā

1

2

má

2

3

mǎ

3

4

mà

4

5

ma

N

6

bā

LITTLE

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.



25

Check your work CONTINUED

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

7

pā

MORE

8

dào

LITTLE

9

tào

MORE

10

gē

LITTLE

11

kē

MORE

12

qī

JQX

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.



26

Check your work CONTINUED

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

13

chī

ZHCHSHR

14

sān

ZCS

15

xī

JQX

16

rén

ZHCHSHR

17

zǎo

ZCS

18

Hold an 'ee' tongue while rounding your lips.

lù

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.



27

Check your work CONTINUED

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

19

End with the back of the tongue raised.

jīng

20

Keep the tongue posture from sh rather than saying 'ee'.

shì

21

Use rounded lips with the tongue farther back.

lù

22

hǎo

h + ao + 3

23

qù

q + ü (written u after q) + 4

24

ài

NONE + ai + 4

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.



28

Check your work CONTINUED

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

25

rén

r + en + 2

26

lǚ

l + ü + 4

27

mèn

m + en + neutral

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.



29

Check your work CONTINUED

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

28

Choose two contrasts from this workbook. For each, write the tongue/lip/airflow cue, two example syllables, and one date to try them again without looking.

ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER

b/p—hold paper at the lips; p should move it more; bā/pā; retry September 5. u/ü—keep lips rounded but move the tongue forward for ü; lù/lǜ; retry September 7.

Success criteria: Any two distinct contrasts with a physical cue, examples, and a future cold-practice date are acceptable.

Second attempt

Cover the model. Recreate it from memory, change one useful detail, and note the repair you want to revisit.

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.