

INTRODUCTORY CHINESE GRAMMAR I



All Set Learning

Book: Introductory Chinese Grammar I

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Licensing

*A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.*

1: PARTS OF SPEECH

These following grammar points fit pretty neatly into one part of speech category.

1: Adverbs

- 1.1: Negation of "you" with "mei"
- 1.2: Standard negation with "bu"
- 1.3: The "all" adverb "dou"
- 1.4: The "also" adverb "ye"

2: Conjunctions

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7: Verb phrases

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1: ADVERBS

1.1: Negation of "you" with "mei"

1.2: Standard negation with "bu"

1.3: The "all" adverb "dou"

1.4: The "also" adverb "ye"

1.1: Negation of "you" with "mei"

The verb 有 (yǒu) is negated differently from ordinary verbs. Rather than placing 不 (bù) before it as with other verbs, you must use 没 (méi) to negate the verb 有 (yǒu).

Structure

Nearly all verbs can be **negated with 不 (bù)**. The verb 有 (yǒu) is an important exception to this rule, and must be negated with 没 (méi).

没 + 有 (+ Obj.)

Note: because of the special relationship between 没 (méi) and 有 (yǒu), the pinyin for 没有 is normally written without a space: "méiyǒu."

Examples

- 我 没有 问题 ° Wǒ méiyǒu wèntí. I don't have any questions.
- 我们 现在 没有 钱 ° Wǒmen xiànzài méiyǒu qián. We don't have money now.
- 他 没有 工作 吗? Tā méiyǒu gōngzuò ma? Does he not have a job?
- 他们 没有 爸爸 妈妈 ° Tāmen méiyǒu bàba māma. They don't have parents.
- 我们 在 北京 没有 房子 ° Wǒmen zài Běijīng méiyǒu fángzi. We don't have a house in Beijing.
- 你 爸爸 没有 手机 吗? Nǐ bàba méiyǒu shǒujī ma? Does your dad not have a cell phone?
- 你们 在 上海 没有 朋友 吗? Nǐmen zài Shànghǎi méiyǒu péngyou ma? Do you not have friends in Shanghai?
- 我的 老师 现在 没有 男朋友 ° Wǒ de lǎoshī xiànzài méiyǒu nán péngyou. My teacher doesn't have a boyfriend now.
- 他们 都 没有 电脑 吗? Tāmen dōu méiyǒu diànnǎo ma? Do they all not have computers?
- 这个 周末 你们 都 没有 时间 吗? Zhège zhōumò nǐmen dōu méiyǒu shíjiān ma? Do you all not have time this weekend?

Remember that trying to negate 有 (yǒu) with 不 (bù) is a classic mistake that many people make in the early stages of studying Chinese:

- 我 不 有 车 ° *Never use 不 with 有!* Wǒ bù yǒu chē.
- 我 没有 车 ° *Always use 没 with 有!* Wǒ méiyǒu chē. I don't have a car.

Never use 不 (bù) with 有 (yǒu).

The Short Form of 没有 (méiyǒu) Is 没 (méi)

没有 (méiyǒu) can be shortened to 没 (méi) without altering its meaning.

- 我 没钱 ° Wǒ méi qián. I don't have money.
- 你 没 男朋友 吗? Nǐ méi nán péngyou ma? Do you not have a boyfriend?
- 你们 没 车 吗? Nǐmen méi chē ma? You don't have a car?
- 老板 现在 没 时间 ° Lǎobǎn xiànzài méi shíjiān. The boss doesn't have time right now.
- 我 没 工作, 我 老公 也 没 工作 ° Wǒ méi gōngzuò, wǒ lǎogōng yě méi gōngzuò. I don't have a job. My husband doesn't have a job either.

See also

- [Negation of past actions with "meiyou"](#)
- [Standard negation with "bu"](#)
- [Inability with "mei banfa"](#)
- [Comparing "bu" and "mei"](#)

YouTube Video

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Mandarin Chinese Lesson with Yangyang - Grammar Lesson 5 (没-méi) Yoyo Chinese: [Negation word 没](#)

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1.2: Standard negation with "bu"

不 (bù) is generally used to negate a [verb](#) in the present or future, or to talk about what you do not do, as a habit. So expressing things like "I don't want to go" or "I'm not going" or "I don't eat meat" would be typical uses of 不 (bù).

Negating Verbs

Structure

The standard way to negate verbs in Chinese is with 不 (bù). To negate a verb, simply place 不 (bù) before it:

Subj. + 不 + Verb + Obj.

Examples

- 他们 不是 坏 孩子 ° Tāmen *bù shì* huài háizi. They are not bad kids.
- 我们 不 喝 酒 ° Wǒmen *bù hē* jiǔ. We don't drink alcohol.
- 我 今天 不 想 工作 ° Wǒ jīntiān *bù xiǎng* gōngzuò. I don't want to work today.
- 你 不 喜欢 我 吗 ? Nǐ *bù xǐhuan* wǒ ma? Do you not like me?
- 为什么 你 不 喜欢 喝 咖啡 ? Wèishénme nǐ *bù xǐhuan hē* kāfēi? Why don't you like to drink coffee?

Almost all verbs can be negated with 不 (bù) ([unless you're talking about the past](#)). The only verb that can never be negated with 不 (bù) is 有 (yǒu).

- 我 不 有 时间 ° Wǒ *bù yǒu* shíjiān.
- 我 没有 时间 ° Wǒ *méiyǒu* shíjiān. I don't have time.

Negating Adjectives

As it turns out, the structure with an [adjective](#) is basically the same as the one with a verb.

Structure

Subj. + 不 + Adj.

Examples

- 我 不 饿 ° Wǒ *bù è*. I'm not hungry.
- 这 个 不 贵 ° Zhège *bù guì*. This is not expensive.
- 公 司 不 大 ° Gōngsī *bù dà*. The company is not big.
- 老 板 今 天 很 不 高 兴 ° Lǎobǎn jīntiān hěn *bù gāoxìng*. The boss is very unhappy today.
- 我 哥 哥 不 高 , 但 是 很 帅 ° Wǒ gēge *bù gāo* , dànshì hěn shuài. My older brother is not tall, but he is very handsome.

YouTube Video

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Mandarin Chinese Lessons with Yangyang - Grammar 004 (negation word bú). Yoyo Chinese: [Negation word 不](#)

See also

- [Negation of "you" with "mei"](#)
- [Negation of past actions with "meiyou"](#)

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1.3: The "all" adverb "dou"

The adverb 都 (dōu) is used to express "all" in Chinese. It's common to use 都 (dōu) in a variety of sentences where it would seem unnecessary in English.

都 (dōu) for "All"

Structure

Subj. + 都 + [Verb Phrase]

Remember that 都 (dōu) appears *after* the subject. A common mistake learners make is to put 都 (dōu) at the beginning of the sentence (as "all" often appears there in English). This isn't good Chinese - make sure you put 都 (dōu) after the subject and before the verb.

Examples

- 你们 都 认识 John 吗 ? Nǐmen *dōu* rènshi John ma? Do you all know John?
- 他们 都 在上海 ° Tāmen *dōu* zài Shànghǎi. They are all in Shanghai.
- 明天 我们 都 可以 去 ° Míngtiān wǒmen *dōu* kěyǐ qù. Tomorrow we all can go.
- 你们 都 用 wiki 吗 ? Nǐmen *dōu* yòng wiki ma? Do you all use the wiki?
- 我们 都 要 冰水 ° Wǒmen *dōu* yào bīngshuǐ. We all want ice water.

都 (dōu) for "Both"

Chinese doesn't normally use a special word for "both" like English does. It just uses 都 (dōu) as if it were any other number greater than one. Chinese also doesn't have a special pattern like "neither / nor" for the negative case. Just use 都 (dōu) and make the sentence negative.

Structure

Subj. + 都 + [Verb Phrase]

This pattern should look familiar.

Examples

These examples follow exactly the same form in Chinese as the ones above. The only difference is that here we don't translate 都 (dōu) as "all" in English; we translate it as "both," and for negative cases, we translate it as "neither."

- 我们 两个 都 爱 你 ° Wǒmen liǎng gè *dōu* ài nǐ. The two of us both love you.
- 你 爸爸 和 你 妈妈 都 是 美国 人 吗 ? Nǐ bàba hé nǐ māma *dōu* shì Měiguó rén ma? Are your father and your mother both Americans?
- 我 和我 太太 都 不 吃 肉 ° Wǒ hé wǒ tàitai *dōu* bù chī ròu. Neither my wife nor I eat meat.
- 你们 两个 都 喜 欢 中 国 菜 吗 ? Nǐmen liǎng gè *dōu* xǐhuan Zhōngguó cài ma? Do you both like Chinese food?
- 她 和 她 老 公 都 没 有 工 作 ° Tā hé tā lǎogōng *dōu* méiyǒu gōngzuò. Neither she nor her husband has a job.

See also

- ["Ye" and "dou" together](#)
- [The "also" adverb "ye"](#)

Sources and further reading

Books

- [HSK Standard Course 1](#) (pp. 108) 40 Lessons for Basic Chinese Course (基础汉语40课上册) → [buy](#)
- [Integrated Chinese: Level 1, Part 1 \(3rd ed\)](#) (pp. 53-4) 40 Lessons for Basic Chinese Course (基础汉语40课上册) → [buy](#)
- [New Practical Chinese Reader 1](#) (新实用汉语课本1) (pp. 88) 40 Lessons for Basic Chinese Course (基础汉语40课上册) → [buy](#)
- [Basic Patterns of Chinese Grammar](#) (pp. 35) 40 Lessons for Basic Chinese Course (基础汉语40课上册) → [buy](#)

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1.4: The "also" adverb "ye"

The English adverb "too" or "also" is expressed in Chinese as 也 (yě). In Chinese, it *always* needs to come before the verb (or adjective).

也 (yě) with Verb Phrases

Structure

Since it is an **adverb**, 也 (yě) is inserted after the subject, before the **verb** or **verb phrase**.

Subj. + 也 + Verb / [Verb Phrase]

Examples

- 我也喜欢 ° Wǒ yě xǐhuan. I also like it.
- 我也是学生 ° Wǒ yě shì xuésheng. I am a student too.
- 她也有一个儿子 ° Tā yě yǒu yī gè érzi. She also has a son.
- 他们也是法国人吗? Tāmen yě shì Fǎguó rén ma? Are they also French?
- 我也想学中文 ° Wǒ yě xiǎng xué Zhōngwén. I also want to study Chinese.
- 他们也会去吗? Tāmen yě huì qù ma? Are they also going?
- 我妈妈也喜欢吃饺子 ° Wǒ māma yě xǐhuan chī jiǎozi. My mother likes to eat boiled dumplings too.
- 孩子也可以喝酒吗? Háizi yě kěyǐ hējiǔ ma? Can kids drink alcohol too?
- 你也想来我家吗? Nǐ yě xiǎng lái wǒ jiā ma? Do you want to come to my house too?
- 她也觉得这个老师不好 ° Tā yě juéde zhège lǎoshī bù hǎo. She also thinks this teacher isn't good.

Let's take one more look at two different English sentences which mean the same thing, but can result in bad Chinese if you translate word-for-word.

- 我也喜欢 ° Wǒ yě xǐhuan. I also like it.
- 我喜欢也 ° Wǒ xǐhuan yě. I like it too.

Note that the translation for the first sentence is "I also like it." The translation of the second sentence is "I like it too," which is equally correct in English, but translated word-for-word into Chinese, the 也 (yě) comes at the end of the sentence, which is **100% wrong** in Chinese.

A Note on the Negative Form

Please note that in English, we replace the word "too" with "either" in negative sentences. For example:

- **A:** I like cats.
- **B:** I like cats *too*.
- **A:** I *don't* like cats.
- **B:** I don't like cats *either*.

In Chinese, regardless of whether the sentence is positive ("I like them **too**") or negative ("I **don't** like them **either**"), 也 (yě) is used the same way. Just make sure you put the 也 (yě) *before* the 不 (bù) or other negative part that comes before the verb.

- 我也不喜欢 ° Wǒ yě bù xǐhuan. I don't like it either.
- 我也不知道 ° Wǒ yě bù zhīdào. I don't know either.
- 他也没有 ° Tā yě méiyǒu. He doesn't have it either.
- 你也不想来我家吗? Nǐ yě bù xiǎng lái wǒ jiā ma? You don't want to come to my house either?

也 (yě) with Adjectives

Structure

也 (yě) can also be used with adjectives. Remember that for [simple "noun + adjective" sentences](#) you normally need to include an adverb like 很 (hěn) before the adjective. In that case, just put the 也 (yě) before the adverb.

Subj. + 也 (+ Adv.) + Adj.

Examples

- 你 也很高 ° Nǐ yě **hěn** gāo. You are also tall.
- 他 也很胖 ° Tā yě **hěn** pàng. He is also fat.
- 我 爸爸 也很帅 ° Wǒ bàba yě **hěn** shuài. My dad is also handsome.
- 湖南菜 也很辣 ° Húnán cài yě **hěn** là. Hunan food is very spicy too.
- 这种酒 也很好喝 ° Zhè zhǒng jiǔ yě **hěn** hǎohē. This kind of alcohol is also good.
- 这个地方 也很漂亮 ° Zhège dìfang yě **hěn** piàoliang. This place is also pretty.
- 昨天很冷，今天 也很冷 ° Zuótiān hěn lěng, jīntiān yě **hěn** lěng. Yesterday was cold, and today is also cold.
- 他生气了？我 也很生气！ Tā shēngqì le? Wǒ yě **hěn** shēngqì! He got angry? I'm also angry!
- 这个问题 也很麻烦 ° Zhège wèntí yě **hěn** máfan. This problem is also very troublesome.
- 我觉得这个餐厅 也很好 ° Wǒ juéde zhège cāntīng yě **hěn** hǎo. I think that this restaurant is also good.

Expressing "Me Too" with 也 (yě)

It can be tricky to know how to say "me too" when you first study 也 (yě), as you can't say "wǒ yě" all by itself. That's not a complete sentence; you can't just leave 也 (yě) hanging there with nothing after it.

The all-purpose correct sentence is "wǒ yě shì," which literally means, "I am too," but can also stand in for "me too."

Structure

The correct structure uses the verb 是 (shì):

- 我 也是 ° *The 是 fills in for whatever was just said.* Wǒ yě **shì**. I am too. / Me too.
- 我 也 ° *Always put something after 也! It never ends a sentence.* Wǒ yě.

Examples

The "me too" structure works with other subjects, as well. But for these simple examples, we'll stick to the classic 我 (wǒ) subject.

- **A:** 我 是 美国人 ° Wǒ shì Měiguó rén. I am an American.
- **B:** 我 也 是 ° Wǒ yě **shì**. Me too. / I am too.

For this next one, you'll notice that the "me too" reply repeats the original verb 喜欢 (xǐhuan) instead of using 是 (shì). Both ways are possible.

- **A:** 我 喜欢 看书 ° Wǒ xǐhuan kàn shū. I like to read.
- **B:** 我 也 喜欢 ° Wǒ yě **xǐhuan**. Me too. / So do I.

You'll notice that some of those English translations use "so do I." The Chinese works exactly the same; they're just translated that way to produce more natural-sounding English.

See also

- ["Ye" and "dou" together](#)
- [Expressing "and also" with "hai"](#)
- [The "all" adverb "dou"](#)
- [Expressing "and also" with "hai"](#)

Sources and further reading

Books

- [HSK Standard Course 1](#) (pp. 98) [40 Lessons for Basic Chinese Course \(基础汉语40课上册\)](#) → [buy](#)
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2: Conjunctions

Grammar Point (English)	Pattern	Examples
Expressing "and" with "he"	Noun 1 + 和 + Noun 2	我 和 他 都 不 去 °
Offering choices with "haishi"	A + 还是 + B ?	你 要 喝 茶 还 是 咖 啡 ？

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2.1: Expressing "and" with "he"

When listing out multiple nouns, 和 (hé) is there to help you out. Just remember that 和 (hé) isn't a word you can use to translate just *any* usage of the English word "and."

Structure

The most common way to express "and" in Chinese is with 和 (hé). It's important to note that 和 (hé) **is mainly used to link nouns**. This is how you should use it *exclusively* as you get used to it. Don't try to link [verbs](#) (or whole sentences) with 和 (hé).

Noun 1 + 和 + Noun 2

Examples

- 你 和我 **nǐ hé wǒ** you and I
- 老板 喜欢 咖啡 和 茶 ° **Lǎobǎn xǐhuan kāfēi hé chá.** The boss likes coffee and tea.
- 我的 爷爷 和 奶奶 都 70 岁 ° **Wǒ de yéye hé nǎinai dōu qīshí suì.** My grandpa and grandma are both 70 years old.
- 他 和 他 女朋友 都 喜欢 中国 菜 ° **Tā hé tā nǚpéngyou dōu xǐhuan Zhōngguó cài.** He and his girlfriend both like Chinese food.
- 你 爸爸 和 你 妈妈 都 是 美国 人 吗 ? **Nǐ bàba hé nǐ māma dōu shì Měiguó rén ma?** Are your father and your mother both Americans?
- 手机 和 电脑 都 很 贵 ° **Shǒujī hé diànnǎo dōu hěn guì.** Cell phones and computers are both expensive.
- 德语 和 法语 都 很 难 吗 ? **Déyǔ hé Fǎyǔ dōu hěn nán ma?** Are both German and French difficult?
- 今天 和 明天 都 可以 吗 ? **Jīntiān hé míngtiān dōu kěyǐ ma?** Are today and tomorrow both OK?

(If you're unclear why the 都 (dōu) is used in the sentences above, see our article on [the adverb 都 \(dōu\)](#).)

Just to be absolutely clear what we mean by using 和 (hé) with nouns only, here are two English examples of what you should and shouldn't try to express with 和 (hé):

- I went to the store *and* bought some gum. *Don't use 和 (hé) for this "and"! "Went to the store" and "bought some gum" are both verb phrases, not nouns.*
- I like to eat cucumbers *and* cheese. *This one is good! "Cucumbers" and "cheese" are both nouns, so you can use 和 (hé) here.*

See also

- [Expressing "in addition" with "haiyou"](#)
- ["In addition" as "lingwai"](#)
- [Expressing "not only... but also"](#)
- [Combining verbs with "bing"](#)

2.2: Offering choices with "haishi"

还是 (háishi) is used in Chinese to provide options in a **question**. This is equivalent to one of our uses of "or" in English.

Simplest Form

Structure

Option A + 还是 + Option B ?

When you're asked a question of this form, there are two ways you're expected to answer: either Option A or Option B. (Pick one, but not both.) It's not that no other answers are possible, it's that usually when you're asked a question this way, the person asking expects you to just choose one. For example, if asked if you'd like to drink coffee or tea, most people are going to choose one or the other, not ask for both. 还是 (háishi) is used to ask people to make that choice between the two.

Examples

- 我 还是 他 ? **Wǒ háishi tā?** Me or him?
- 一个 还是 两个 ? **Yī gè háishi liǎng gè?** One or two?
- 辣的 还是 不 辣的 ? **Là de háishi bù là de?** Spicy or non-spicy?
- 冰的 还是 热的 ? **Bīng de háishi rè de?** Cold or hot?
- 上海 还是 北京 ? *The eternal China expat question! Choose wisely...* **Shànghǎi háishi Běijīng?** Shanghai or Beijing?

Full Sentence Form

Structure

You can take the structure above, add a subject and a verb, and create all kinds of questions with the following structure:

Subj. + Verb + Option A + 还是 + Option B ?

Examples

- 这是 水 还是 酒 ? **Zhè shì shuǐ háishi jiǔ?** Is this water or alcohol?
- 他是 美国 人 还是 英国 人 ? **Tā shì Měiguó rén háishi Yīngguó rén?** Is he American or British?
- 你 喜欢 我 还是 我的 钱 ? **Nǐ xǐhuan wǒ háishi wǒ de qián?** Do you like me or my money?
- 你 要 喝 茶 还是 咖啡 ? **Nǐ yào hē chá háishi kāfēi?** Do you want to drink tea or coffee?
- 你们 想 吃 中国 菜 还是 法国 菜 ? **Nǐmen xiǎng chī Zhōngguó cài háishi Fǎguó cài?** Do you want to eat Chinese food or French food?

Please note that 还是 (háishi) is for offering options in a **question**. It should not be used for "or" in statements.

See also

- ["Or" in statements](#)
- ["Had better" with "haishi"](#)
- [Providing two options with double "huozhe"](#)
-

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3: Numbers

Grammar Point (English)	Pattern	Examples
Age with "sui"	Subj. + Number + 岁	我 20 岁 °
Measure word "ge"	Number + 个 + Noun	一 个人 °
Structure of dates	Number + 年 + Number + 月 + Number + 日	今天 是 2011年 11月 11日/号 °
Structure of days of the week	星期 + Number	今天 星期三 °
Structure of numbers	Number + Unit	三 百 五 十 九 °
Structure of times (basic)	Number + 点(钟)	现在 十一点 °

3.1: Age with "sui"

Use 岁 (sui) to give a person's age, similar to how we say "years old" in English. There are a details that work differently from English, however.

Basic Structure for 岁 (suì)

Structure

The structure for telling someone's age with 岁 (suì) is:

Subj. + Number + 岁

This is equivalent to someone "is x years old" in English. Notice that you don't need to include any verb when you use 岁 (suì).

Examples

- 我 20 岁 ° Wǒ èrshí suì. I am 20 years old.
- 我 儿子 一 岁 ° Wǒ érzi yī suì. My son is one year old.
- 我 妈妈 今年 45 岁 ° Wǒ māma jīnnián sìshí-wǔ suì. My mother is 45 years old this year.
- 你 爷爷 今年 80 岁 吗? Nǐ yéye jīnnián bāshí suì ma? Is your grandpa eighty years old this year?
- 他 女朋友 也 20 岁 吗? Tā nǚpéngyou yě èrshí suì ma? Is his girlfriend also twenty years old?

Note that you shouldn't use either the verb 是 (shì) or the [measure word](#) like 个 (gè) in any of these sentences.

- 我的 孩子 一个 岁 ° Wǒ de háizi yī gè suì.
- 我的 孩子 是 一 岁 ° Wǒ de háizi shì yī suì.
- 我的 孩子 一 岁 ° Wǒ de háizi yī suì. My child is one year old.

Adding "And a Half" to an Age

Structure

The word for "half" in Chinese is 半 (bàn), and you simply add this after 岁 (suì).

Subj. + Number + 岁 + 半

Examples

- 她 两岁半 ° Tā liǎng suì bàn. She is two and a half years old.
- 我 儿子 一 岁半 ° Wǒ érzi yī suì bàn. My son is one and a half years old.

See Also

- [Word order](#)
- [Simple "noun + adjective" sentences](#)

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3.2: Measure word "ge"

个 (gè) is the most commonly used [measure word](#). It can be used in a pinch for any noun if you can't think of a more precise measure word. (Although you might not sound quite as smart, you'll still get your point across). Also, for many nouns, 个 (gè) is the only correct measure word.

Counting Nouns

Structure

The general structure for 个 (gè) and measure words in general is:

Number + 个 + Noun

Any time you want to state *how many* of a noun in Chinese, you probably need a measure word. First get used to how they are used with 个 (gè).

Examples

- 一个人 yī gè rén one person
- 四个朋友 sì gè péngyou four friends
- 三个苹果手机 sān gè Píngguǒ shǒujī three iPhones
- 五个星期 wǔ gè xīngqī five weeks
- 六个月 liù gè yuè six months
- 两个老婆 liǎng gè lǎo pó two wives
- 十个男人，七个傻，八个坏 ° A line from a song Shí gè nán rén, qī gè shǎ, bā gè huài. Ten men: seven are fools, and eight are bad.

Omitting the Number

Structure

Verb + 个 + Noun

If the number is one (1), you can omit it and use 个 (gè) by itself. This is similar to "a" or "an" in English, for example in "a person" or "an idiot." (The tone on 个 (gè) is normally somewhat de-emphasized in this usage, but still written as fourth tone. You don't need to stress about it, though.)

Examples

- 他是个老外 ° Tā shì gè lǎowài. He is a foreigner.
- 我有个儿子 ° Wǒ yǒu gè érzi. I have a son.
- 她是个好老师 ° Tā shì gè hǎo lǎoshī. She is a good teacher.
- 你想吃个包子吗? Nǐ xiǎng chī gè bāozi ma? Would you like to eat a stuffed steamed bun?
- 老师，我有个问题 ° Lǎoshī, wǒ yǒu gè wèntí. Teacher, I have a question.

See also

- [Counting money](#)
- [Measure words in quantity questions](#)
- [Measure words for counting](#)

- Measure words to differentiate

3.3: Structure of dates

Dates in Chinese follow the order "year, month, day." This is in keeping with the "from big to small" trend which pervades many facets of Chinese culture.

Structure

Dates are arranged from largest unit to smallest: *year, month, day*.

x 年 + y 月 + z 日

So April 1st, 2019 is **2019年4月1日** (**èr-líng-yī-jiǔ nián Sìyuè yī rì**).

Note that 号 (hào) is commonly used in *spoken* Mandarin instead of 日 (rì):

x 年 + y 月 + z 号

The above example becomes: **2019年4月1号** (**èr-líng-yī-jiǔ nián Sìyuè yī hào**). In written Chinese, however, you will see 日 (rì) rather than 号 (hào).

Examples

- 1868 年 1 月 18 号 Yī-bā-liù-bā nián Yīyuè shíbā hào January 18, 1868
- 1910 年 8 月 9 号 Yī-jiǔ-yī-líng nián Bāyuè jiǔ hào August 9, 1910
- 2001 年 7 月 20 日 Èr-líng-líng-yī nián Qīyuè èrshí rì July 20th, 2001
- 1 月 1 日 是 新年 ° Yīyuè yī rì shì Xīnnián. January 1st is New Year's Day.
- 12 月 24 日 是 平安夜 ° Shí-èryuè èrshí-sì rì shì Píng'ān Yè. December 24th is Christmas Eve.
- 10 月 1 号 我们 去 上海 ° Shíyuè yī hào wǒmen qù Shànghǎi. We will go to Shanghai on October 1st.
- 我 1990 年 7 月 出生 ° Wǒ Yī-jiǔ-jiǔ-líng nián Qīyuè chūshēng. I was born in July 1990.
- 你的 生日 是 11 月 11 号 吗? Nǐ de shēngrì shì Shíyīyuè shíyī hào ma? Is your birthday November 11th?
- 我 2006 年 4 月 17 号 认识 了 他 ° Wǒ èr-líng-líng-liù nián Sìyuè shíqī hào rènshi le tā. I met him on April 17, 2006.
- 1980 年 9 月 4 号 我们 结婚 了 ° Yī-jiǔ-bā-líng nián Jiǔyuè sì hào wǒmen jiéhūn le. We got married on September 4th, 1980.

See Also

- [Structure of numbers](#)
- [Structure of days of the week](#)
- [Structure of times](#)

3.4: Structure of days of the week

星期 (xīngqī) means "week" in Chinese. This is also used to indicate which weekday you are talking about.

Structure

Days of the week in Chinese are formed by the word "week" followed by a number:

English	Chinese
Monday	星期一 Xīngqīyī
Tuesday	星期二 Xīngqī'èr
Wednesday	星期三 Xīngqīsān
Thursday	星期四 Xīngqīsì
Friday	星期五 Xīngqīwǔ
Saturday	星期六 Xīngqīliù
Sunday	星期天 Xīngqītiān

Notice that Sunday is the only exception. Rather than a number, 天 (tiān) is used. More formally, Sunday is also referred to as 星期日 (Xīngqīrì).

One other implication of this system that you may not have noticed: "day one" is Monday. In Chinese culture, the first day of the week is Monday, and *not* Sunday.

Examples

- 今天是星期一吗？是 *is optional* Jīntiān shì Xīngqīyī ma? Is today Monday?
- 明天星期五，太高兴了。 *Optional* 是 *omitted* Míngtiān Xīngqīwǔ, tài gāoxìng le. Tomorrow is Friday. I'm so happy.
- 星期三我不在上海。 Xīngqīsān wǒ bù zài Shànghǎi. I'm not here in Shanghai on Wednesday.
- 星期二早上我很忙。 Xīngqī'èr zǎoshang wǒ hěn máng. I am busy on Tuesday morning.
- 你星期天要做什么？ Nǐ Xīngqītiān yào zuò shénme? What are you doing on Sunday?
- 上个星期五我跟他见面了。 Shàng gè Xīngqīwǔ wǒ gēn tā jiànmiàn le. I met him last Friday.
- 这个星期三晚上你有空吗？ Zhè gè Xīngqīsān wǎnshang nǐ yǒu kòng ma? Are you free this Wednesday evening?
- 下个星期四是我的生日。 Xià gè Xīngqīsì shì wǒ de shēngrì. My birthday is on next Thursday.
- 这个星期五晚上我们要去酒吧。 Zhè gè Xīngqīwǔ wǎnshang wǒmen yào qù jiǔbā. We're going to a bar this Friday night.
- 星期六和星期天我们不上班。 Xīngqīliù hé Xīngqītiān wǒmen bù shàngbān. Saturday and Sunday we don't work.

Other Words for "Week"

Hopefully this doesn't freak you out, but there are actually two other ways to say "week" in Chinese. You should still learn 星期 (xīngqī) first, and that's really all you need as a beginner.

The other words for "week" are 礼拜 (lǐbài) and 周 (zhōu). Skip them for now unless you really need them.

See Also

- [Structure of numbers](#)
- [Structure of dates](#)

3.5: Structure of Numbers

Chinese handles numbers in a very consistent and logical way. Once you've mastered just a few tricky parts, you will know how to read out any number in Chinese.

One to One Hundred

Structure for the First Ten

You just have to memorize these ten; nothing tricky there.

Numeral	Character	Pinyin
1	一	yī
2	二	èr
3	三	sān
4	四	sì
5	五	wǔ
6	六	liù
7	七	qī
8	八	bā
9	九	jiǔ
10	十	shí

Phone Numbers

Like in American English, Chinese phone numbers are given as a string of individual numbers, using the digits 0-9. The only trick is that the number 1 is often pronounced "yāo" instead of "yī" to avoid confusion with number 7, which is pronounced "qī."

- 110 *Number for the police in the PRC* yāo yāo líng
- 120 *Number for an ambulance in the PRC* yāo èr líng
- 119 *Number to report a fire in the PRC* yāo yāo jiǔ
- 13501200120 *Cell phone numbers are 11 digits in the PRC* yāo sān wǔ, líng yāo èr líng, líng yāo èr líng

Structure for Teens

十 + x

Eleven, twelve and the teens are handled very logically. They're formed with 十 (shí) followed by a digit 一 (yī) to 九 (jiǔ). So eleven is 十一 (shíyī), twelve is 十二 (shí'èr), thirteen is 十三 (shísān), and so on up to nineteen, which is 十九 (shíjiǔ).

Numeral	Character	Pinyin
11	十一	shíyī
12	十二	shí'èr
13	十三	shísān
14	十四	shísì

15	十五	shíwǔ
16	十六	shíliù
17	十七	shíqī
18	十八	shíbā
19	十九	shíjiǔ

Structure for Tens

All the tens are also formed very logically. Twenty is 二十 (èrshí), thirty is 三十 (sānshí), and so on. Units in the tens are simply added on the end. So twenty one is 二十一 (èrshí-yī), thirty four is 三十四 (sānshí-sì), and ninety-nine is 九十九 (jiǔshí-jiǔ). All very logical and consistent.

x + 十

x + 十 + y

Examples

Numeral	Character	Pinyin
20	二十	èrshí
23	二十三	èrshí-sān
30	三十	sānshí
39	三十九	sānshí-jiǔ
40	四十	sìshí
44	四十四	sìshí-sì
50	五十	wǔshí
73	七十三	qīshí-sān
82	八十二	bāshí-èr
97	九十七	jiǔshí-qī

And one hundred is simply 一百 (yībǎi), as in English. So you now know how to count to one hundred in Chinese.

After One Hundred

Dealing with Zeroes

Note: when there's a "0" in the middle of a number, you read it as 零 (líng), and don't put a unit (like "ten" or "hundred") after it. In the following examples, we'll show what happens when the "tens" place is a zero in a three-digit number.

Structure

x + 百 + 零 + y

Examples

Numeral	Character	Pinyin
---------	-----------	--------

101	一百零一	yībǎi líng yī
202	二百零二	èrbǎi líng èr
206	二百零六	èrbǎi líng liù
305	三百零五	sānbǎi líng wǔ
407	四百零七	sìbǎi líng qī
504	五百零四	wǔbǎi líng sì
602	六百零二	liùbǎi líng èr
701	七百零一	qībǎi líng yī
803	八百零三	bābǎi líng sān
909	九百零九	jiǔbǎi líng jiǔ

For Numbers 110 and Greater

For numbers greater than 100, if the number ends in zero (110, 230, 370, 450, etc.), a number like 150 can be read as 一百五十 (yībǎi wǔshí), but is often read as 一百五 (yībǎi wǔ). In fact, reading it as 一百五 (yībǎi wǔ) *always* means 150, never 105. As described above, 105 would be read as 一百零五 (yībǎi líng wǔ).

For numbers greater than 100 that end in a number in the teens, it's normal to pronounce the ten as "yīshí" rather than just "shí" (see the examples below).

Also, sometimes the number "200" is read as 二百 (èrbǎi), but often it is read as 两百 (liǎngbǎi). Both are OK. (This is an 二 (èr) vs. 两 (liǎng) issue which you may or may not have encountered before.)

Structure

x + 百 + y + 十 + z

Examples

Numeral	Character	Pinyin
110	一百一十	yībǎi yīshí
111	一百一十一	yībǎi yīshí-yī
210	二百一十	èrbǎi yīshí
350	三百五十	sānbǎi wǔshí
480	四百八十	sìbǎi bāshí
550	五百五十	wǔbǎi wǔshí
635	六百三十五	liùbǎi sānshí-wǔ
777	七百七十七	qībǎi qīshí-qī
832	八百三十二	bābǎi sānshí-èr
999	九百九十九	jiǔbǎi jiǔshí-jiǔ

After One Thousand

千 (qiān) means "thousand" in Chinese. Its rules of usage are similar to the rules for "hundred." Just note that no matter how many zeroes are in the middle of the number, you just say 零 (líng) once.

Examples

Numeral	Character	Pinyin
1001	一千零一	yīqiān líng yī
1010	一千零一十	yīqiān líng yīshí
1019	一千零一十九	yīqiān líng yīshí-jiǔ
1020	一千零二十	yīqiān líng èrshí
1100	一千一百	yīqiān yībǎi
1101	一千一百零一	yīqiān yībǎi líng yī
1234	一千二百三十四	yīqiān èrbǎi sānshí-sì
2345	两千三百四十五	liǎngqiān sānbǎi sìshí-wǔ
8765	八千七百六十五	bāqiān qībǎi liùshí-wǔ
9999	九千九百九十九	jiǔqiān jiǔbǎi jiǔshí-jiǔ

10,000 and beyond

Things get a little trickier once you get to 10,000. If you're ready for it, you can move on to [big numbers](#).

See also

- [Big numbers in Chinese](#)
- [Structure of dates](#)
- [Structure of days of the week](#)
- [Measure words](#)
- ["Er" and "liang"](#)

3.6: Structure of times (basic)

Time in Chinese, just like in English, is expressed by stating the hour first, and then the minute (big to small).

On the Hour

The time of day in Chinese is formed with a [number](#) 1 to 12 (一 (yī) to 十二 (shí'èr)) followed by 点 (diǎn). This 点 (diǎn) is equivalent to o'clock in English. In China, people generally use a twelve-hour clock, preceded by 上午 (shàngwǔ) for "a.m." or 下午 (xiàwǔ) for "p.m." when necessary.

Structure

(Date and/or time of day +) x 点

Sometimes people use the longer 点钟 (diǎnzhōng) instead of just 点 (diǎn), but you're fine using the short form.

Examples

If you want to include more specific information, start with the day or date, followed by the general time of day, with the exact clock time last. (This is the big-to-small pattern.) This is how Chinese gets around the need for "a.m." or "p.m.": use 上午 (shàngwǔ) for times in the morning, and 下午 (xiàwǔ) for times in the afternoon.

- 九 点jiǔ diǎn9 o'clock
- 上午七 点shàngwǔ qī diǎn7 o'clock a.m.
- 下午四 点xiàwǔ sì diǎn4 o'clock p.m.
- 中午十二 点zhōngwǔ shí'èr diǎn12 o'clock noon
- 明天晚上七 点míngtiān wǎnshang qī diǎn7 o'clock p.m. tomorrow evening
- 9月9号早上六 点jiǔ yuè jiǔ hào zǎoshang liù diǎnSeptember 9th, 6 o'clock a.m.
- 星期三上午九 点Xīngqīsān shàngwǔ jiǔ diǎnWednesday at 9 o'clock a.m.

Note that **two o'clock is** 两点 (liǎng diǎn), not 二点 (èr diǎn). (For more information on when to use 两 (liǎng) vs. 二 (èr), see our article on [comparing "er" and "liang"](#)).

"Twelve o'clock," however, is still 十二点 (shí'èr diǎn).

Half Hours

Half hours are added after 点 (diǎn) and are indicated with 半 (bàn).

Structure

x 点 + 半

Examples

- 五 点半wǔ diǎn bàn5:30
- 下午两 点半xiàwǔ liǎng diǎn bàn2:30 p.m.
- 星期天上午十 点半Xīngqītiān shàngwǔ shí diǎn bànSunday at 10:30 a.m.
- 昨天晚上七 点半zuótiān wǎnshang qī diǎn bàn7:30 yesterday evening
- 今天下午四 点半jīntiān xiàwǔ sì diǎn bàn4:30 p.m. this afternoon.

As a beginner, that should be all you need. If you've mastered all of these structures and want to get a little more advanced, see

[structure of times \(advanced\)](#).

HSK Notes

Simple times with 点 (diǎn) is on HSK1, but the usage above with 半 (bàn) is not. It is not tested until HSK3.

See also

- [Structure of times \(advanced\)](#)
- [Structure of numbers](#)
- [Structure of dates](#)
- [Structure of days of the week](#)

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4: Particles

Grammar Point (English)	Pattern	Examples
Expressing close possession without "de"	Pronoun + Noun	我 女朋友
Expressing possession with "de"	Noun 1 + 的 + Noun 2	我的 老师
Questions with "ne"	……呢？	我 很好 ° 你 呢？
Suggestions with "ba"	Command + 吧	我们 走 吧 °

4.1: Expressing close possession without "de"

Expressing possession in Chinese is accomplished with the particle 的 (de). But sometimes when certain (especially close) relationships are involved, it's more natural to drop the 的 (de).

Structure

Pronoun + Noun

Normally possession is expressed using the particle 的 (de). However, you can omit 的 (de) in these cases:

- A close personal relationship is involved (family, close friends, boyfriends or girlfriends)
- An institutional or organizational relationship is involved (school, work)

In these cases 的 (de) **should be** omitted. It doesn't sound as natural if you leave it in.

Examples

- 我家很大 ° *Wǒ jiā hěn dà*. My house is very big.
- 你哥哥很高 ° *Nǐ gēge hěn gāo*. Your big brother is very tall.
- 这是我女朋友 ° *Zhè shì wǒ nǚ péngyou*. This is my girlfriend.
- 她妈妈很漂亮 ° *Tā māma hěn piàoliang*. Her mom is very pretty.
- 我们学校很大 ° *Wǒmen xuéxiào hěn dà*. Our school is big.
- 他们公司在北京 ° *Tāmen gōngsī zài Běijīng*. Their company is in Beijing.
- 你男朋友很帅 ° *Nǐ nán péngyou hěn shuài*. Your boyfriend is very handsome.
- 他儿子很有名 ° *Tā érzi hěn yǒumíng*. His son is really famous.
- 我女儿会说英语 ° *Wǒ nǚ'ér huì shuō Yīngyǔ*. My daughter can speak English.
- 他爸爸是我们公司的老板 ° *Tā bàba shì wǒmen gōngsī de lǎobǎn*. His dad is the boss of our company.

If 的 (de) was used in the above examples, it would create an unnatural sense of distance between the two.

See also

- [Expressing possession with "de"](#)
- [Modifying nouns with adjective + "de"](#)
- [Modifying nouns with phrase + "de"](#)

4.2: Expressing possession with "de"

In Chinese, possession is marked with the particle 的 (de), placed after the "owner" noun or noun phrase. This particle works in a similar way to apostrophe-"s" in English, but is used much more broadly in Chinese. This article highlights one of its simplest and most common usages.

Structure

Noun 1 + 的 + Noun 2

This means "**Noun 1's Noun 2**" (where Noun 2 belongs to Noun 1).

The structure is super simple. It will take a bit of time before you realize how truly universal this pattern is. It doesn't matter whether the "Noun 1" is a person, place, or thing, or even if it's a pronoun (like "he," "she," or "it"). The structure stays consistent.

Examples

- 我的老师wǒ de lǎoshīmy teacher
- 你的手机nǐ de shǒujīyour cell phone
- 我们的钱wǒmen de qiánour money
- 他们的东西tāmen de dōngxitheir stuff
- 爸爸的车bàba de chēdad's car
- 你们的菜nǐmen de càiyour food
- 北京的空气Běijīng de kōngqìBeijing's air
- 公司的老板gōngsī de lǎobǎnthe company's boss
- 上海的天气Shànghǎi de tiānqìShanghai's weather
- 老师的朋友lǎoshī de péngyouteacher's friend

See also

- [Expressing close possession](#)
- [Modifying nouns with adjective + "de"](#)
- [Modifying nouns with phrase + "de"](#)

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4.3: Questions with "ne"

The particle 呢 (ne) can be used to ask reciprocal questions, also known as "bounce back" questions. 呢 (ne) can also be used to form simple questions asking "what about...?" or "how about...?"

General Questions with 呢 (ne)

Structure

Topic + 呢 ?

And it's as simple as that. Say what you want to ask about, then stick 呢 (ne) on the end. A very common way to use this is to return a question after being asked it. The classic example is this exchange:

- **A:** 你好吗 ? Nǐ hǎo ma?
- **B:** 我很好 ° 你呢 ? Wǒ hěn hǎo. Nǐ ne?
- **A:** 我也很好 ° Wǒ yě hěn hǎo.

Examples

More 呢 (ne) examples (each of these can be translated as a "what about" question):

- 这个很好 , 那个呢 ? Zhège hěn hǎo, nàge ne? This one is good. What about that one?
- 这个用中文怎么说 ? 那个呢 ? Zhège yòng Zhōngwén zěnmē shuō? Nàge ne? How do I say this in Chinese? And that?
- 我在家 , 你呢 ? Wǒ zài jiā. Nǐ ne? I'm at home. What about you?
- 你爸爸是上海人 , 你妈妈呢 ? Nǐ bàba shì Shànghǎi rén, nǐ māma ne? Your father is Shanghainese. And your mom?
- 你哥哥有工作 , 弟弟呢 ? Nǐ gēge yǒu gōngzuò. Dìdi ne? Your big brother has a job. What about your little brother?
- 北京下雨了 ° 上海呢 ? Běijīng xià yǔ le. Shànghǎi ne? It's raining in Beijing. How about in Shanghai?
- 我现在要出去 ° 你呢 ? Wǒ xiànzài yào chūqù. Nǐ ne? I'm going to go out now. How about you?
- 我知道你会说中文 ° 你老公呢 ? Wǒ zhīdào nǐ huì shuō Zhōngwén. Nǐ lǎogōng ne? I know you can speak Chinese. What about your husband?
- 这个周末我想去酒吧 ° 你们呢 ? Zhège zhōumò wǒ xiǎng qù jiǔbā. Nǐmen ne? I want to go to a bar this weekend. What about you all?
- 今天晚上没空 ? 明天晚上呢 ? Jīntiān wǎnshàng méi kòng? Míngtiān wǎnshàng ne? You don't have time tonight? What about tomorrow evening?

Asking "Where" with 呢 (ne)

You'll occasionally hear someone seemingly using 呢 (ne) out of the blue. When this happens, they're usually asking *where* someone or something is, and they expect that you know what they're talking about and know where that person or thing is.

Structure

[Missing Person / Thing] + 呢 ?

Examples

This one is simple, so just a few examples are needed:

- 钱呢 ? Qián ne? Where's the money?
- 你妈妈呢 ? Nǐ māma ne? Where's your mom?
- 我的手机呢 ? Wǒ de shǒujī ne? Where's my cell phone?

See also

- [Yes-no questions with "ma"](#)
- [Tag questions with "ma"](#)
- [Softening the tone of questions with "ne" \(advanced article\)](#)

4.4: Suggestions with "ba"

The particle 吧 (ba) has [a number of different uses](#). Here we'll talk about the simplest way to use 吧 (ba): making suggestions.

Structure

Command + 吧

Note that in Chinese, whenever you have a command with the subject "we," you're basically just saying, "**let's** (do something)." 吧 (ba) just makes the suggestion sound more tentative and more polite.

Examples

- 我们走吧 ° *This is a suggestion.* Wǒmen zǒu ba. Let's go.
- 你说吧 ° *This is a suggestion.* Nǐ shuō ba. You say it.
- 快点吃吧 ° *This is a suggestion.* Kuài diǎn chī ba. Hurry up and eat.
- 给我两个吧 ° *This is a suggestion.* Gěi wǒ liǎng gè ba. Give me two.
- 喝水吧 ° *This is a suggestion.* Hē shuǐ ba. Have some water.
- 我们去香港吧 ° *This is a great suggestion!* Wǒmen qù Xiānggǎng ba. Let's go to Hong Kong.
- 我们六点去吧? *This is more of a confirmation than a suggestion.* Wǒmen liù diǎn qù ba? We're going at 6 o'clock (right)?
- 休息一下吧 ° *This is a suggestion.* Xiūxi yíxià ba. Take a break.
- 我们结婚吧 ° *This is also suggestion, believe it or not!* Wǒmen jiéhūn ba. Let's get married.
- 老板, 便宜一点吧 ° *This is more of a request, made to a shopkeeper.* Lǎobǎn, piányi yīdiǎn ba. Boss, can you make it cheaper?

See also

- [Softening speech with "ba"](#)
- [Softening the tone of questions with "ne"](#) (advanced article)
- [Conceding with "ba"](#)

5.1: Expressing existence in a place with "zài"

The verb 在 (zài) expresses existence in a location, similar to how we say in English, "to be at" or "to be in."

Structure

The verb 在 (zài) is used to express existence in a place. English does not have a verb exclusively for this purpose, and instead uses "to be" with a [preposition](#). In Chinese, 在 (zài) can cover both of these roles.

Subj. + 在 + Place

Remember that you don't need another verb in this construction. It can be tempting to try use 是 (shì), as English uses "to be," but this is not correct. 在 (zài) is the only verb needed.

Examples

- 我在上海 ° Wǒ zài Shànghǎi. I'm in Shanghai.
- 他们在英国 ° Tāmen zài Yīngguó. They're in England.
- 老板在外面 ° Lǎobǎn zài wàimiàn. The boss is outside.
- 他不在学校 ° Tā bù zài xuéxiào. He's not at school.
- 她现在在家吗? Tā xiànzài zài jiā ma? Is she at home now?
- 你在公司吗? *Literally, "Are you at the company?"* Nǐ zài gōngsī ma? Are you at the office?
- 老师不在办公室吗? Lǎoshī bù zài bàngōngshì ma? Is the teacher not in the office?
- 谁在楼上? Shéi zài lóushàng? Who is upstairs?
- 我和朋友在酒吧 ° Wǒ hé péngyou zài jiǔbā. I'm with a friend at a bar.
- 你们明天在北京吗? Nǐmen míngtiān zài Běijīng ma? Are you guys in Beijing tomorrow?

See also

- [Indicating location with "zài" before verbs](#)
- [Special cases of "zài" following verbs](#)
- [Expressing location with "zài...shang/xia/li"](#)

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5.2: Expressing existence with "you"

The verb 有 (yǒu), which means "to have," can also be used to express existence. This is similar to saying "there is" or "there are" in English.

Structure

Literally, this structure expresses that a place "has" a thing, which is to say, that thing is in the place.

Place + 有 + Obj.

Examples

- 我家有很多小狗 ° Wǒ jiā yǒu hěn duō xiǎo gǒu. There are a lot of puppies in my home.
- 我们学校有很多帅哥 ° Wǒmen xuéxiào yǒu hěn duō shuàigē. There are a lot of cute guys in our school.
- 日本有很多中国人 ° Rìběn yǒu hěn duō Zhōngguó rén. There are many Chinese people in Japan.
- 这个酒吧有很多美女 ° Zhège jiǔbā yǒu hěn duō měinǚ. There are a lot of pretty girls in this bar.
- 你家有牛奶吗? Nǐ jiā yǒu niúǎi ma? Is there milk in your house?
- 这里有一个问题 ° Zhèlǐ yǒu yī gè wèntí. There is a problem here.
- 房间里有人吗? Fángjiān lǐ yǒu rén ma? Is there anyone in the room?
- 杯子里有水吗? Bēizi lǐ yǒu shuǐ ma? Is there any water in the cup?
- 我的手机里有你的号码 ° Wǒ de shǒujī lǐ yǒu nǐ de hàomǎ. Your number is in my cell phone.
- 现在办公室里有人吗? Xiànzài bàngōngshì lǐ yǒu rén ma? Is there anyone in the office now?

See also

- [Expressing existence](#)

5.3: Expressing possession with "you"

有 (yǒu) [can be used in various ways](#), but the most basic meaning of this [verb](#) you need to know is "to have."

Structure

Subj. + 有 + Obj.

Examples

- 我 有 钱 ° Wǒ yǒu qián. I have money.
- 你 有 房 子 吗 ? Nǐ yǒu fángzi ma? Do you have a house?
- 她 没 有 车 ° Tā méi yǒu chē. She doesn't have a car.
- 他 有 女 朋 友 吗 ? Tā yǒu nǚpéngyou ma? Does he have a girlfriend?
- 我 们 有 三 个 女 儿 ° Wǒmen yǒu sān gè nǚ'ér. We have three daughters.
- 我 们 家 有 两 个 公 司 ° Wǒmen jiā yǒu liǎng gè gōngsī. Our family has two companies.
- 你 有 一 百 块 钱 吗 ? Nǐ yǒu yī bǎi kuài qián ma? Do you have 100 kuài RMB?
- 你 的 老 师 有 iPad 吗 ? Nǐ de lǎoshī yǒu iPad ma? Does your teacher have an iPad?
- 我 爸 爸 没 有 工 作 ° Wǒ bàba méi yǒu gōngzuò. My dad doesn't have a job.
- 今 天 你 有 课 吗 ? Jīntiān nǐ yǒu kè ma? Do you have classes today?

Negating 有 (yǒu)

The verb 有 (yǒu) is negated in a special way. Unlike most verbs, it is negated with 没 (méi) instead of 不 (bù). The negative form of 有 (yǒu) then, is 没有 (méi yǒu). For more on that topic, see our article on [negation of "you" with "mei."](#)

See also

- [Expressing existence with "you"](#)
- [Negation of "you" with "mei"](#)

5.4: Using the verb "jiao"

The verb 叫 (jiào) is used to indicate what someone or something is called, or what someone or something's name is. Its usage can seem a little weird to beginners, so it gets its own grammar point.

Structure

The verb 叫 (jiào) means both "to call" and "to be called." It's an easy way to give names, using the following structure:

Subj. + 叫 + [Name]

This can be used to give your full name or just your first name.

Examples

- 我叫 Tom ° *Note: it even works if you don't have a Chinese name!* Wǒ jiào Tom. My name is Tom.
- 他叫 李小龙 ° *Note: this is the real name of Bruce Lee* Tā jiào Lǐ Xiǎolóng. His name is Li Xiaolong.
- 我哥哥叫 老马 ° *Note: this is probably not his real name* Wǒ gēge jiào Lǎo Mǎ. My brother is called Lao Ma.
- 那个叫什么? Nàge jiào shénme? What is that called?
- 这个美女叫 Alana ° Zhège měinǚ jiào Alana. This pretty girl is named Alana.
- 我们的老板叫 John ° Wǒmen de lǎobǎn jiào John. Our boss is named John.
- 我的狗叫 Max ° Wǒ de gǒu jiào Max. My dog is called Max.
- 这种手机叫 iPhone ° Zhè zhǒng shǒujī jiào iPhone. This kind of cell phone is called an iPhone.
- 你爸爸叫什么? Nǐ bàba jiào shénme? What is your dad's name?
- 这个地方叫 外滩 ° Zhège dìfang jiào Wàitān. This place is called the Bund.

You can also ask people their names using 叫 (jiào):

- 你叫什么名字? Nǐ jiào shénme míngzi? What's your name?

See also

- [Using the verb "xing"](#)
- [Introducing people](#)

5.5: Using the verb "qu"

You can use 去 (qù) whenever you have somewhere to go. It's pretty easy to get a handle on this verb; the only trick is getting used to not needing a word for "to" before the destination.

去 (qù) with Just a Place

The verb 去 (qù) means "to go," and is an easy way to talk about going to places.

Structure

Subj. + 去 + [Place]

Notice that you don't need a word to express "to."

Examples

- 我去公司 ° 公司 *literally means "company" but is often used to mean "office."* Wǒ qù gōngsī. I'm going to the office.
- 你去洗手间吗? Nǐ qù xǐshǒujiān ma? Are you going to the restroom?
- 下午我会去超市 ° Xiàwǔ wǒ huì qù chāoshì. In the afternoon, I'll go to the supermarket.
- 我们现在去公园 ° Wǒmen xiànzài qù gōngyuán. We're going to the park now.
- 晚上我们去酒吧 ° 你去吗? Wǎnshang wǒmen qù jiǔbā. Nǐ qù ma? Tonight we're going to the bar. Are you going?

You can also use 去 (qù) for [asking questions](#). (Note the use of question words and question particles.)

- **A:** 你去哪儿? Nǐ qù nǎr? Where are you going?
- **B:** 我去学校 ° Wǒ qù xuéxiào. I am going to school.
- **A:** 你去我家吗? Nǐ qù wǒ jiā ma? Are you going to my place?
- **B:** 我去 ° *literally, "I'm going."* Wǒ qù. Yes.

When answering a yes-no question that uses 去 (qù) you don't need anything following it. However, it's important to note that you cannot just use 去 (qù) when there is no context.

去 (qù) with a Verb

Instead of a place, 去 (qù) can also be followed by some sort of action. The structure then means "go to do (something)," and "go and do (something)."

Structure

Subj. + 去 + Verb

Examples

- 我去工作 ° Wǒ qù gōngzuò. I'm going to work.
- 他去上课 ° Tā qù shàngkè. He's going to class.
- 你想去旅行吗? Nǐ xiǎng qù lǚxíng ma? Would you like to go travel?
- 我们去吃饭吧 ° Wǒmen qù chīfàn ba. Let's go eat.
- 九点我们去买 ° Jiǔ diǎn wǒmen qù mǎi. At 9 o'clock, we'll go buy it.

See also

- [Expressing movement](#)

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5.6: Using the verb "xing"

The verb 姓 (xìng) literally means "to be surnamed" or "to have the surname." It may seem awkward at first that there's a verb just for this, but you'll find that it's used quite often in Chinese.

Giving One's Surname

姓 (xìng) is used most often to tell someone your own surname ("family name" or "last name"), or to ask the surname of someone else.

Structure

Subj. + 姓 + [Surname]

Examples

- 我 姓 王 ° Wǒ xìng Wáng. My family name is Wang.
- 你 老板 姓 李 吗 ? Nǐ lǎobǎn xìng Lǐ ma? Is your boss's last name Li?
- 那 个 帅 哥 姓 张 ° Nàge shuàigē xìng Zhāng. That handsome guy's last name is Zhang.
- 我 爸爸 姓 周 , 我 妈妈 姓 林 ° Wǒ bàba xìng Zhōu, wǒ māma xìng Lín. My father's family name is Zhou. My mother's family name is Lin.
- 他 女 朋 友 姓 钱 ° Tā nǚpéngyou xìng Qián. His girlfriend's last name is Qian.
- 你 好 , 我 姓 毛 ° Nǐ hǎo, wǒ xìng Máo. Hello. My last name is Mao.
- 我 姓 赵 , 我 太 太 也 姓 赵 ° Wǒ xìng Zhào, wǒ tàitai yě xìng Zhào. My last name is Zhao. My wife's last name is also Zhao.
- 我 的 中 文 老 师 姓 陈 ° Wǒ de Zhōngwén lǎoshī xìng Chén. My Chinese teacher's surname is Chen.
- 你 奶 奶 也 姓 陈 吗 ? Nǐ nǎinai yě xìng Chén ma? Is your grandma's family name also Chen?
- 他 们 都 姓 李 ° Tāmen dōu xìng Lǐ. All of their surnames are Li.

Asking Someone's Surname

You can also use 姓 (xìng) to ask people their surnames. You could do this quite directly by saying:

- 你 姓 什 么 ? Nǐ xìng shénme? What is your last name?

However, the formal way to ask has a set form:

- 您 贵 姓 ? Nín guì xìng? What is your honorable surname?

Literally this means "What is your honorable surname?" Use this form to be polite when asking people their surnames.

See also

- [Using the verb "jiao"](#)
- [Introducing people](#)

6: Auxiliary verbs

Grammar Point (English)	Pattern	Examples
Expressing ability or possibility with "neng"	能 + Verb	中文 这么 难 , 你 能 学 好 吗 ?
Expressing a learned skill with "hui"	会 + Verb	他 会 说 中 文 。
Expressing "be going to" with "yao"	Subj. + 要 + Verb (+ 了)	我 要 去 吃 饭 , 你 去 吗 ?
Expressing permission with "keyi"	可以 + Verb	这 里 可 以 吸 烟 吗 ?
Wanting to do something with "yao"	要 + Verb	我 要 吃 饭 。

6.1: Expressing ability or possibility with "neng"

能 (néng) is one of several Chinese words that is normally translated as "can" in English. However, 能 (néng) is used to emphasize one's ability or the possibility of something happening.

Expressing Ability

能 (néng) indicates ability when used with activities that are not consciously learned or studied.

Structure

The structure to use 能 (néng) to express "ability" is:

Subj. + 能 + Verb + Obj.

Examples

- 我能吃四十个饺子 ° Wǒ *néng* chī sìshí gè jiǎozi. I can eat 40 dumplings.
- 他能工作24个小时 ° Tā *néng* gōngzuò èrshí-sì gè xiǎoshí. He can work 24 hours.
- 你能帮我找到他吗? Nǐ *néng* bāng wǒ zhǎodào tā ma? Can you help me find him?
- 你的手机能上网吗? Nǐ de shǒujī *néng* shàngwǎng ma? Can your cell phone go on the internet?
- 一岁的宝宝能说话吗? Yī suì de bǎobao *néng* shuōhuà ma? Can a one year old baby talk?

Expressing Possibility

When used with activities that are consciously learned or studied, 能 (néng) generally means that circumstances do not allow execution of the action. In other words, it's *not possible*.

Structure

The structure to use 能 (néng) to express possibility is exactly the same:

Subj. + 能 + Verb + Obj.

Examples

- 开车一个小时能到家吗? Kāichē yī gè xiǎoshí *néng* dào jiā ma? Is it possible to drive home in one hour?
- 他们明天能早点来吗? Tāmen míngtiān *néng* zǎo diǎn lái ma? Would it be possible for them to come a little earlier tomorrow?
- 你们能小声一点吗? Nǐmen *néng* xiǎo shēng yīdiǎn ma? Could you all lower your voices a bit?
- 你能告诉我她的手机号码吗? Nǐ *néng* gàosu wǒ tā de shǒujī hàomǎ ma? Could you tell me her cell phone number?
- 一千块能买一个手机吗? Yīqiān kuài *néng* mǎi yī gè shǒujī ma? Is it possible to buy a cell phone with one thousand RMB?

Other Usages

From these examples we can see such circumstances might be pertaining to getting someone's consent or reliant on the speaker's health. If the speaker wishes to express that they are able to execute an action requiring a consciously studied skill, 会 (huì) can be used instead.

Because 能 (néng) can express possibility, it is often used to form polite questions, something like "would it be possible" in

English:

Examples

- 我能问你一个问题吗？*Wǒ néng wèn nǐ yí gè wèntí ma?* Could I ask you a question?
- 我能坐在这里吗？*Wǒ néng zuò zài zhèlǐ ma?* Could I sit here?
- 这里不能游泳 ° *It's not allowed, or not possible for other reasons.* Zhèlǐ bù néng yóuyóǒng. You can't swim here.
- 上课的时候不能说英文 ° *My teacher has forbidden me from speaking English.* Shàngkè de shíhou bù néng shuō Yīngwén. In class, you can't speak English.
- 工作的时候不能玩手机 ° *Gōngzuò de shíhou bù néng wán shǒujī.* When working, you can't play with your cell phone.

See also

- [Expressing permission with "keyi"](#)
- [Expressing a learned skill with "hui"](#)
- [Comparing "hui" "neng" "keyi"](#)

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6.2: Expressing a learned skill with "hui"

The word 会 (huì) can be used to express an ability that has been learned (a skill). In this case 会 (huì) is an [auxiliary verb](#).

Basic Usage

Structure

Subj. + 会 + Verb + Obj.

This structure is the easiest way to express all kinds of skills, from languages, to sports, to skills in daily life such as cooking and driving.

Examples

- 他会说中文 ° Tā huì shuō Zhōngwén. He can speak Chinese.
- 我会写汉字 ° Wǒ huì xiě Hànzì. I can write Chinese characters.
- 你会做饭吗? Nǐ huì zuòfàn ma? Can you cook food?
- 狗会唱歌吗? Gǒu huì chànggē ma? Can dogs sing?
- 爸爸会开车 ° Bàba huì kāichē. Dad can drive.

Negating 会 (huì) Sentences

Structure

会 (huì) sentences are [negated with 不 \(bù\)](#), which is inserted in front of 会 (huì):

Subj. + 不 + 会 + Verb + Obj.

Again, this is the simplest way to express the lack of a learned ability. So while "can't" is a natural translation for "不会" (bù huì) in English, "don't know how to" is equally correct (and perhaps more helpful).

Also, due to a [tone change rule](#) for "不" (bù), the phrase "不会" (bù huì) is actually pronounced "bú huì."

Examples

- 我不会说英文 ° Wǒ bù huì shuō Yīngwén. I can't speak English.
- 妈妈不会做中国菜 ° Māma bù huì zuò Zhōngguó cài. Mom can't cook Chinese food.
- 你不会游泳吗? Nǐ bù huì yóuyóu ma? You can't swim?
- 我奶奶不会用电脑 ° Wǒ nǎinai bù huì yòng diànnǎo. My grandmother can't use a computer.
- 你不会开车吗? Nǐ bù huì kāichē ma? You can't drive a car?

Note that if we say 我不能说中文 (wǒ bù néng shuō Zhōngwén), the speaker is saying that he can't speak Chinese [for some reason other than his own ability](#), perhaps because speaking Chinese in English class is forbidden.

See also

- [Expressing ability or possibility with "neng"](#)

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6.3: Expressing "be going to" with "yao"

The [auxiliary verb](#) 要 (yào) has [several different meanings](#), and here we'll tackle the "be going to" meaning. You'll use this when you are discussing your plans with someone.

Structure

The idea behind this usage of 要 (yào) is that someone is "planning to" or "going to" or "preparing to" do something. It's not that they just *want to*, or *have to*, it's that they fully expect to do it. It's in their plan.

This usage of 要 (yào) typically includes a [time word](#) of some sort, which may be placed before or after the subject. This is fairly logical; if you're discussing plans for the future, you're quite likely to say when you plan to do things.

Subj. + Time + 要 + Verb

Time + Subj. + 要 + Verb

Note that the time word is not strictly required, and when it's missing, you may at first find yourself wondering [which usage of 要 \(yào\)](#) you're dealing with. This is normal; it just takes some getting used to.

Examples

- 我明天要买一个 iPhone ° Wǒ míngtiān yào mǎi yī gè iPhone. I am going to buy an iPhone tomorrow.
- 你们现在要出去吗? Nǐmen xiànzài yào chūqù ma? Are you all going out now?
- 我们今年要去美国 ° Wǒmen jīnnián yào qù Měiguó. We are planning to go to the U.S. this year.
- 他下个月要来中国工作 ° Tā xià gè yuè yào lái Zhōngguó gōngzuò. He is coming to China to work next month.
- 你下个星期要去她家吃晚饭吗? Nǐ xià gè xīngqī yào qù tā jiā chī wǎnfàn ma? Are you going to her place for dinner next week?
- 这个星期天你要做什么? Zhège Xīngqītiān nǐ yào zuò shénme? What are you doing this Sunday?
- 我晚上要给妈妈打电话 ° Wǒ wǎnshang yào gěi māma dǎ diànhuà. I am going to call my mom this evening.
- 下午老师要来我家 ° Xiàwǔ lǎoshī yào lái wǒ jiā. The teacher is coming to my place this afternoon.
- 老板明天要见他们吗? Lǎobǎn míngtiān yào jiàn tāmen ma? Is the boss going to meet them tomorrow?
- 下班以后你要回家吗? Xiàbān yǐhòu nǐ yào huíjiā ma? Are you planning to go home after getting off work?

See also

- [About to happen with "le"](#)
- [Wanting to do something with "yao"](#)
- [Auxiliary verb "hui" for "will"](#)

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6.4: Expressing permission with "keyi"

可以 (kěyǐ) is an [auxiliary verb](#) primarily used for expressing permission. It's often translated as "can," but in order to not get it confused with other words, it's best to think of it as "may" to emphasize the *permission* aspect.

Basic Usage

Just put 可以 (kěyǐ) in directly before a [verb](#) to create a meaning of "may" (plus the verb). It's the same structure whether it's a statement or a question.

Structure

Subj. + 可以 + Verb + Obj.

Use this structure to express permission to do things.

Examples

- 我可以进来吗？Wǒ kěyǐ jìnlái ma? May I come in?
- 二十岁以后可以喝酒。Èrshí-yǐ suì yǐhòu kěyǐ hējiǔ. After you are 21 years old, you may drink alcohol.
- 妈妈，我可以出去玩吗？Māma, wǒ kěyǐ chūqù wán ma? Mom, may I go out and play?
- 我们可以在办公室吃饭吗？Wǒmen kěyǐ zài bàngōngshì chīfàn ma? Can we eat in the office?
- 我可以在这停车吗？Wǒ kěyǐ zài zhèlǐ tíngchē ma? Can I park here?

Negating 可以 (kěyǐ) Sentences

可以 (kěyǐ) sentences are [negated with 不 \(bù\)](#), which is inserted before 可以 (kěyǐ).

Structure

Subj. + 不 + 可以 + Verb + Obj.

Examples

- 孩子不可以看这个。Háizi bù kěyǐ kàn zhège. Children can't watch this.
- 你现在不可以进去。Nǐ xiànzài bù kěyǐ jìnqù. You can't go in right now.
- 这里不可以抽烟。Zhèlǐ bù kěyǐ chōuyān. You can't smoke here.
- 我们都不可以去。Wǒmen dōu bù kěyǐ qù. None of us may go.
- 你不可以说脏话。Nǐ bù kěyǐ shuō zānghuà. You can't say swear words.

See also

- [Expressing ability or possibility with "neng"](#)
- [Comparing "hui" "neng" "keyi"](#)
- [Expressing a learned skill with "hui"](#)

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6.5: Wanting to do something with "yao"

The [auxiliary verb](#) 要 (yào) has [several different meanings](#), and here we'll tackle the "want to" meaning. To express "wanting to do" something, use 要 (yào) before the verb.

Structure

The verb 要 (yào) can be used as an [auxiliary verb](#) to indicate *wanting to do* something.

Subj. + 要 + Verb + Obj.

Examples

- 他要学中文 ° Tā yào xué Zhōngwén. He wants to study Chinese.
- 宝宝要睡觉 ° Bǎobao yào shuìjiào. The baby wants to sleep.
- 早饭我要吃肉 ° Zǎofàn wǒ yào chī ròu. For breakfast I want to eat meat.
- 今天很累，我要休息 ° Jīntiān hěn lèi, wǒ yào xiūxi. Today I'm very tired. I want to rest.
- 这个周末你们要做什么？ Zhège zhōumò nǐmen yào zuò shénme? This weekend what do you want to do?

要 (yào) and 想 (xiǎng)

Instead of using 要 (yào), it is also possible to use the word 想 (xiǎng). These two words are largely interchangeable, and both can mean "to want." The small difference is that 要 (yào) is often used for something you want to or *need to do*, and *plan to take action on*. It can sound a bit more demanding (and less polite). 想 (xiǎng) on the other hand, often conveys an idea on one's mind, that one *may or may not take action on*. You can think of it as meaning "would like to."

Examples

- 我要喝咖啡 ° I am going to get my hands on some coffee Wǒ yào hē kāfēi. I want to drink coffee.
- 我想喝咖啡 ° I want to drink a cup of coffee, but may or may not act on that Wǒ xiǎng hē kāfēi. I'd like to drink coffee.
- 你要吃什么？ Nǐ yào chī shénme? What do you want to eat?
- 你想吃什么？ Nǐ xiǎng chī shénme? What would you like to eat?

See also

- ["Would like to" with "xiang"](#)
- [Comparing "yao" and "xiang"](#)
- [Auxiliary verb "hui" for "will"](#)

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7.1: How to do something with "zenme"

怎么 (zěnmě) means "how" in Chinese, and it's not hard to use at all: just put it before a [verb](#).

The Basic "How to Verb" Usage

Structure

The question word 怎么 (zěnmě) is used to ask *how* in Chinese. It is inserted in front of the verb that's being asked about:

Subj. + 怎么 + Verb + Obj.

Note that the subject can often be omitted from general "how to" questions, and there doesn't always have to be an object.

Examples

- 你们 怎么 学 中文? Nǐmen *zěnmě* xué Zhōngwén? How do you study Chinese?
- 你 怎么 上班? 坐 地铁 吗? Nǐ *zěnmě* shàngbān? Zuò dìtiě ma? How do you get to work? By metro?
- 你 知道 怎么 去 外滩 吗? Nǐ zhīdào *zěnmě* qù Wàitān ma? Do you know how to get to the Bund?
- 你 怎么 知道 我 喜欢 旅行? Nǐ *zěnmě* zhīdào wǒ xǐhuan lǚxíng? How did you know I like to travel?
- 我 不 知道 怎么 跟 女孩子 说话 ° Wǒ bù zhīdào *zěnmě* gēn nǚháizi shuōhuà. I don't know how to talk to girls.

Topic First

Starting a "how to" question with the [topic](#) at the beginning of the question is very common. That is, the thing being asked about is introduced first, then a question is asked about how to do something involving it.

Structure

Topic + 怎么 + Verb

The object doesn't have to come after the verb. Sometimes it moves to the front of the question, establishing what the question is going to be about, before getting specific with the "how" question.

Examples

- 芒果 怎么 吃? Mángguǒ *zěnmě* chī? How do you eat mangos?
- iPad 怎么 用? iPad *zěnmě* yòng? How do you use an iPad?
- 语法 怎么 学? Yǔfǎ *zěnmě* xué? How do you study grammar?
- 中国 菜 怎么 做? Zhōngguó cài *zěnmě* zuò? How do you cook Chinese food?
- "Apple" 怎么 说? the "in Chinese" is implied "Apple" *zěnmě* shuō? How do you say apple?

See Also

- [Placement of question words](#)
- [Asking questions](#)

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7.2: Negation of past actions with "meiyou"

You can use 不要 (bùyào) to command someone: "don't" (do something). This is similar to the other negative command "别 (bié)."

Note: The pinyin for 不要 is written "bùyào" but pronounced "búyào" due to a [tone change rule](#).

Structure

Negative commands in Chinese ("do not" or "don't") are formed with 不要. Usually the subject is omitted, as in English.

不要 + Verb

Examples

- 不要走 ° *Bùyào zǒu.* Don't leave.
- 不要打我 ! *Bùyào dǎ wǒ!* Don't hit me!
- 不要生气 , 好吗 ? *Bùyào shēngqì, hǎo ma?* Don't get angry, OK?
- 不要哭 ! *Bùyào kū!* Don't cry!
- 不要吃很多肉 ° *Bùyào chī hěn duō ròu.* Don't eat a lot of meat.
- 你们不要喝酒 ° *Nǐmen bùyào hējiǔ.* You guys, don't drink alcohol.
- 不要说英文 ° *Bùyào shuō Yīngwén.* Don't speak English.
- 晚上不要喝咖啡 ° *Wǎnshang bùyào hē kāfēi.* Don't drink coffee at night.
- 上课的时候不要玩手机 ! *Shàngkè de shíhou bùyào wán shǒujī!* In class don't play with your phone!
- 不要很晚睡觉 ! *Bùyào hěn wǎn shuìjiào.* Don't go to bed too late.

See also

- [Negative commands with bie](#)

7.3: Negative commands with "buyao"

Use 没有 (méiyǒu) to negate past actions (to say that someone *didn't do* something, or something *didn't happen*).

Structure

Usually verbs can be [negated with 不 \(bù\)](#), but that construction is used for habitual or present actions. If the verb is about an action **in the past**, though, 没有 (méiyǒu) should be used:

Subj. + 没有 / 没 + Verb

Note that you can shorten 没有 (méiyǒu) to just 没 (méi).

Examples

- 我 没有去上班 ° Wǒ méiyǒu qù shàngbān. I didn't go to work.
- 他们 没有说话 ° Tāmen méiyǒu shuōhuà. They didn't speak.
- 我 没有喝 你的 啤酒 ° Wǒ méiyǒu hē nǐ de pījiǔ. I didn't drink your beer.
- 她 没有看到 你 ° Tā méiyǒu kàndào nǐ. She didn't see you.
- 我 没有吃 早饭 ° Wǒ méiyǒu chī zǎofàn. I didn't eat breakfast.
- 宝宝 没哭 ° 有 *has been omitted here*. Bǎobao méi kū. The baby didn't cry.
- 你 昨天 没回家 吗? Nǐ zuótiān méi huíjiā ma? You didn't go back home yesterday?
- 老板 今天 没来 吗? Lǎobǎn jīntiān méi lái ma? The boss didn't come today?
- 老师 今天 没生气 ° Lǎoshī jīntiān méi shēngqì. The teacher didn't get angry today.
- 妈妈 晚上 没做饭 ° Māma wǎnshang méi zuǒfàn. Mom didn't cook food this evening.

Go Easy on the 了 (le)

One thing you need to remember when using 没有 (méiyǒu) is that 了 (**le**) **is not normally used with 没有 (méiyǒu)**. 了 (**le**) marks completed actions, while 没有 (méiyǒu) is used for actions that *didn't happen* (so of course they're not completed). These two don't work together. This is a very common mistake for beginner learners of Chinese.

- 我 没有做 了 ° Wǒ méiyǒu zuò **le**.
- 我 没有做 ° Wǒ méiyǒu zuò. I didn't do it.

See also

- [Negation of "you"](#)
- [Standard negation with "bu"](#)

2: GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

These are grammatical structures that do not correspond to one particular part of speech.

2.1: Basics

- 2.1: Basic sentence order
- 2.2: Connecting nouns with "shi"
- 2.3: Expressing "excessively" with "tai"
- 2.4: Simple "noun + adjective" sentences

2.2: Question Forms

- 2.1: Affirmative-negative question
- 2.2: Placement of question words
- 2.3: Tag questions with "bu"
- 2.4: Tag questions with "ma"
- 2.5: Yes-no questions with "ma"

2.1: Basics

Grammar Point (English)	Pattern	Examples
Basic sentence order	Subj. + Verb (+ Obj.)	我 爱 你 °
Connecting nouns with "shi"	A + 是 + B	我 是 学 生 °
Expressing "excessively" with "tai"	太 + Adj. + 了	太 好 了 !
Simple "noun + adjective" sentences	Noun + 很 + Adj.	我 很 好 °

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2.1: Basic sentence order

In its most basic form, Chinese **word order** is very similar to English word order. These similarities definitely have their limits, though; don't expect the two languages' word orders to stay consistent much beyond the very basic sentence orders outlined below.

Subject-Predicate

A simple **predicate** can be just a verb. The most basic word order in Chinese is:

Structure

Subj. + Verb

You can form very simple sentences with just two words.

Examples

Subject	Verb	Translation
你们Nǐmen	吃 ° chī.	You eat.
他Tā	笑 ° xiào.	He laughs.
我Wǒ	读 ° dú.	I read.
你Nǐ	去 ° qù.	You go.
你们Nǐmen	看 ° kàn.	You look.
你Nǐ	来 ° lái.	You come here!
我Wǒ	说 ° shuō.	I speak.
孩子Háizi	哭 ° kū.	Children cry.
谁Shéi	要学? yào xué?	Who wants to study?
谁Shéi	想玩? xiǎng wán?	Who wants to play?

Subject-Verb-Object

A slightly longer **predicate** might be a verb with an object. A sentence with both a verb and an object is formed with this structure:

Structure

Subj. + Verb + Obj.

This is the same as in English, and is commonly referred to as SVO word order. You can express a huge variety of things with this simple structure.

Examples

Subject	Verb	Object	Translation
他们Tāmen	吃chī	肉 ° ròu.	They eat meat.

你Nǐ	喝hē	茶 吗 ？ chá ma?	Do you drink tea?
我Wǒ	去qù	学校 ° xuéxiào.	I go to school.
他Tā	说shuō	中文 ° Zhōngwén.	He speaks Chinese.
你Nǐ	喜欢xǐhuan	孩子 吗 ？ háizi ma?	Do you like kids?
我们Wǒmen	要 买yào mǎi	电脑 ° diànnǎo.	We want to buy a computer.
你们Nǐmen	想 吃xiǎng chī	中国 菜 吗 ？ Zhōngguó cài ma?	Do you want to eat Chinese food?
我Wǒ	爱ài	你 和 爸爸 ° nǐ hé bàba.	I love you and dad.
他们Tāmen	要 做yào zuò	什 么 ？ shénme?	What do they want to do?
你Nǐ	想 去xiǎng qù	什 么 地 方 ？ shénme dìfang?	What place do you want to go to?

When Things Get Tricky

Despite the convenient word order similarities highlighted above, things start to break down as soon as you start adding in such simple sentence elements as [the "also" adverb 也 \(yě\)](#), [a time word](#), or [a location where something happened](#).

Don't worry; the more complicated Chinese structures aren't hard, they're just different! (If Chinese word order were really the same as English word order, that would be just a little too convenient, wouldn't it?)

See also

- [Word order](#) (a more in depth article)
- [Time words and word order](#)
- [Topic-comment sentences](#)
- [Simple "noun + adjective" sentences](#)
- [Indicating location with "zai" before verbs](#)
- [Expressing location with "zai...shang/xia/li"](#)

2.2: Connecting nouns with "shì"

The verb *to be* is not used in Chinese the same way as it is in English. In Chinese, 是 (shì) is for connecting [nouns](#), and is generally not used with [adjectives](#).

Basic Usage

Structure

The structure for connecting nouns with 是 (shì) is:

Noun 1 + 是 + Noun 2

This is equivalent to "Noun 1 **is** Noun 2" in English.

Chinese does not [conjugate](#) verbs. That is, the form of the verb is the same no matter who is doing it. In this case, it is always 是 (shì) and never changes. As you can see, it's easy to form simple sentences expressing *to be* in Chinese. The only tricky thing about 是 (shì) in Chinese is that it's used to link *two nouns*, so you can't rely too much on translating directly from English when it comes to expressing the English verb "to be" in Chinese.

Examples

- 我是学生 ° Wǒ shì xuésheng. I am a student.
- 你是 John 吗? Nǐ shì John ma? Are you John?
- 他们是有钱人 ° Tāmen shì yǒuqián rén. They are rich people.
- 你是老板吗? Nǐ shì lǎobǎn ma? Are you the boss?
- 这是我男朋友 ° Zhè shì wǒ nán péngyou. This is my boyfriend.
- 那是你们公司吗? Nà shì nǐmen gōngsī ma? Is that your company?
- 你妈妈是老师吗? Nǐ māma shì lǎoshī ma? Is your mother a teacher?
- 这都是你的钱 ° Zhè dōu shì nǐ de qián. This is all your money.
- 那是什么菜? Nà shì shénme cài? What food is that?
- 我也是他的朋友 ° Wǒ yě shì tā de péngyou. I am also his friend.

Other Uses of 是 (shì)

Be careful and take note. As you can see above, 是 (shì) is only used to link two nouns. It cannot be used to link a noun and an adjective. This is a very common mistake for people just beginning to learn Chinese. For that kind of sentence, you'll want to use a different structure with [the linking word 很 \(hěn\)](#).

In Chinese it is also possible to use the phrase "是不是 (shì bu shì)?" It can be used at the beginning or end of a sentence. It's meaning is quite similar to the English expressions "right" and "aren't you?" This is very useful if you want to express concern for a person, or if you want to mix up your sentence structure a bit and make it more interesting. The 是不是 (shì bu shì) pattern is also part of [affirmative-negative questions](#).

Another way to use 是 (shì) is to [use it as a tag question](#). You can add “是吗?” (shì ma?) to the end of a question to mean the English equivalent of: "is it" or "yeah?" Using this in a question usually allows the speaker to get a confirmation answer.

Examples

- 他没听到, 是不是? Tā méi tīngdào, shì bu shì? He didn't hear you, right?
- 你是不是还没吃饭? Nǐ shì bu shì hái méi chīfàn? Haven't you eaten yet?
- 你们是不是中国人? Nǐmen shì bu shì Zhōngguó rén? Are you Chinese?
- 你到了, 是吗? Nǐ dào le, shì ma? You have arrived, yeah?

- 你有两个孩子，是吗？Nǐ yǒu liǎng gè hái zǐ, *shì ma*? You have two kids, yeah?

See Also

- [Word order](#)
- [Simple "noun + adjective" sentences](#)

2.3: Expressing "excessively" with "tai"

In Chinese, the simplest structure for expressing "too" in the sense of "excessively" is by using the word 太 (tài). Don't forget to also add 了 (le) after the adjective to keep your Chinese sounding natural.

Structure

太 + Adj. + 了

As in English, this can express that something really is excessive (often as a complaint), or can also colloquially express the meaning of "so" or "very."

Examples

The following examples sound a little bit like a complaint, or a reason for not doing something. They're similar to how we would use "too" in English, and the translations are straightforward.

- 米饭太多了 ° Mǐfàn tài duō le. There is too much rice.
- 现在太晚了 ° Xiànzài tài wǎn le. Now it's too late.
- 老板太忙了 ° Lǎobǎn tài máng le. The boss is too busy.
- 老师太累了 ° Lǎoshī tài lèi le. The teacher is too tired.
- 这个厕所太脏了 ° Zhègè cèsuǒ tài zāng le. This restroom is too dirty.

In the following examples, the same exact pattern is used to exclaim how *good* something is, so these uses are totally *not* complaints. The English translations have to get a little more creative to express the same feeling in English.

- 你太好了 ° Nǐ tài hǎo le. You are so great.
- 他太帅了 ° Tā tài shuài le. He is very handsome.
- 这个女孩太漂亮了 ° Zhègè nǚhái tài piàoliang le. This girl is so pretty.
- 小猫太可爱了 ! Xiǎomāo tài kě'ài le! The kitten is so cute!
- 你的孩子太聪明了 ° Nǐ de háizi tài cōngmíng le. Your kid is wicked smart.

Note for the more advanced learner: This pattern can be used with [modal verbs](#) (e.g. 会 (huì), 能 (néng)) as well as psychological verbs (e.g. 喜欢 (xǐhuan), 想 (xiǎng), 爱 (ài)) to intensify the degree.

See also

- ["Not very" with "bu tai"](#)
- [Positive adjectives with "-ji le"](#)
- [The "zui" superlative](#)
- [Special verbs with "hen"](#)
- [Expressing "quite" with "ting"](#)

2.4: Simple "noun + adjective" sentences

In English, nouns can be "linked" to adjectives and other nouns with the verb "to be." In Chinese, [nouns](#) are linked to other nouns in one way, but linked to [adjectives](#) in a completely different way. Nouns are linked to other [nouns with 是 \(shì\)](#). Nouns are linked to adjectives with 很 (hěn).

Structure

Noun + 很 + Adj.

The noun in this structure is the subject of the sentence. Sometimes the 很 (hěn) in this structure is translated as "very," but often it is just a way to link a noun to an adjective.

Examples

In the following examples, 很 (hěn) is just a link (you could think of it as a substitute for the verb "to be"), and the sentences could be translated as "(Noun) is (adjective)."

- 我很好 ° Wǒ hěn hǎo. I'm good.
- 你很漂亮 ° Nǐ hěn piàoliang. You are pretty.
- 他很高兴 ° Tā hěn gāoxìng. He is happy.
- 中文很难 ° Zhōngwén hěn nán. Chinese is difficult.
- 老板很生气 ° Lǎobǎn hěn shēngqì. The boss is angry.
- 我们很累 ° Wǒmen hěn lèi. We're tired.
- 我哥哥也很高 ° Wǒ gēge yě hěn gāo. My older brother is also tall.
- 你家也很远吗? Nǐ jiā yě hěn yuǎn ma? Is your house also far away?
- 爸爸很忙, 妈妈也很忙 ° Bàba hěn máng, māma yě hěn máng. Dad is busy, and mom is also busy.
- 他和他弟弟都很帅 ° Tā hé tā dìdì dōu hěn shuài. He and his younger brother are both handsome.

Remember that 是 (shì) is not used to link adjectives to nouns. This is a classic mistake that almost everyone makes when learning Chinese. Make sure you use 很 (hěn) and not 是 (shì) to link adjectives to nouns, as shown below:

- 他是高 ° Tā shì gāo.
- 他很高 ° Tā hěn gāo. He is tall.

What 很 (hěn) Really Means

If you're like most learners, when you first learn this pattern, you're thinking, "How can 很 (hěn) mean "very" one minute, but then nothing but a "link" the next? How do I know if anything means anything in this language?" That's a reasonable response. But in the case of these "Noun + Adj." sentences, you just have to think of this usage of 很 (hěn) as an exception. It's just part of the structure.

If you actually want to add the meaning of "very" into the sentence, you could use another adverb instead of 很 (hěn). One good choice is 非常 (fēicháng).

- 他非常高 ° Tā fēicháng gāo. He is very tall.

See also

- [Connecting nouns with "shì"](#)
- [Emphasizing with "henshi"](#)

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2.2: Question Forms

Grammar Point (English)	Pattern	Examples
Affirmative-negative question	Verb + 不 + Verb / Adj. + 不 + Adj.	去 不 去？好 不 好？
Placement of question words	什么 / 什么时候 / 谁 / 哪儿 / 为什么 / 怎么	你 是 谁？你 在 哪 儿？
Tag questions with "bu"	……是不是 / 对不对 / 好不好？	你们 明天 来，好 不 好？
Tag questions with "ma"	……是吗 / 对吗 / 好吗？	这 样 做，对 吗？
Yes-no questions with "ma"	……吗？	他 是 老 板 吗？

2.1: Affirmative-negative question

Also known as: 正反问句 (zhèng-fǎn wèn-jù) and alternative questions.

A common way to form questions in Chinese is to first use a [verb](#) in the positive, then repeat the same verb in its negative form, similar to how in English we can say, "Do you have money or not?" or "Have you or have you not been to the park?" This sentence pattern feels a lot more natural in Chinese than those admittedly awkward English equivalents, however.

Verb-Not-Verb

Structure

Verb + 不 + Verb

Examples

- 是不是？*Shì bu shì?* Is it (or not)?
- 他们来不来？*Tāmen lái bu lái?* Are they going to come or not?
- 你想不想我？*Nǐ xiǎng bu xiǎng wǒ?* Do you or do you not miss me?
- 我们要去酒吧，你去不去？*Wǒmen yào qù jiǔbā, nǐ qù bu qù?* We are going to the bar. Do you want to go?
- 我去买咖啡，你要不要？*Wǒ qù mǎi kāfēi, nǐ yào bu yào?* I'm going to buy coffee. Do you want some?

Note that the question provides the listener with both possible answers: it's either "Verb" or "不 (bù) Verb."

Verb-Not-Verb with an Object

Structure

If you want to add an object after the verb, the general sentence structure is:

Subj. + Verb + 不 + Verb + Obj.

Examples

- 你回不回家？*Nǐ huí bu huíjiā?* Are you coming back home or not?
- 她吃不吃饭？*Tā chī bu chī yú?* Does she eat fish?
- 你们要不要米饭？*Nǐmen yào bu yào mǐfàn?* Do you want rice?
- 你爸爸喝不喝酒？*Nǐ bàba hē bu hējiǔ?* Does your dad drink alcohol or not?
- 今天老板来不来办公室？*Jīntiān lǎobǎn lái bu lái bàngōngshì?* Is the boss coming to the office today?

Adjective-Not-Adjective

Structure

It can also be done with [adjectives](#) (adjectives often behave like verbs in Chinese):

Adj. + 不 + Adj.

Examples

- 好不好？*Literally, "good or not good?" Hǎo bu hǎo?* Is it good?

- 热 不 热 ? *Rè bu rè?* Is it hot?
- 他 帅 不 帅 ? *Tā shuài bu shuài?* Is he handsome?
- 这 里 的 咖 啡 贵 不 贵 ? *Zhèlǐ de kāfēi guì bu guì?* Is the coffee expensive here?
- 中 国 菜 辣 不 辣 ? *Zhōngguó cài là bu là?* Is Chinese food spicy?

Again, the question provides the listener with both possible answers: it's either "Adjective" or "不 (bù) Adjective."

These are something like adding tag questions in English, in this case "Are you an adult or not?" If you wanted to translate it very literally, it would be, "Are you or are you not an adult?" In any case, the structure is a very common way to ask questions in Chinese.

Two-Character Verbs and Adjectives

All of the verbs used so far have been single-character verbs. Using two-characters verbs in affirmative-negative questions is slightly trickier. You usually put 不 (bù) after just the first character, then put the entire verb. For example 喜不喜欢 (xǐ bu xǐhuan) is the usual question form of 喜欢 (xǐhuan). You can repeat the whole two-character verb twice, but it's more common (and more elegant) to insert 不 (bù) after the first character (and the same is generally true of two-character adjectives).

Structure

It can be done with **verbs**:

[First Character of Verb] + 不 + Verb

It can also be done with **adjectives**:

[First Character of Adj.] + 不 + Adj.

Examples

- 喜 欢 不 喜 欢 ? *whole word repeated* *Xǐhuan bu xǐhuan?* Do you like it?
- 喜 不 喜 欢 ? *only the first character repeated* *Xǐ bu xǐhuan?* Do you like it?
- 高 兴 不 高 兴 ? *whole word repeated* *Gāoxìng bu gāoxìng?* Are you happy?
- 高 不 高 兴 ? *only the first character repeated* *Gāo bu gāoxìng?* Are you happy?
- 他 女 朋 友 漂 亮 不 漂 亮 ? *whole word repeated* *Tā nǚpéngyou piàoliang bu piàoliang?* Is his girlfriend pretty?
- 他 女 朋 友 漂 不 漂 亮 ? *only the first character repeated* *Tā nǚpéngyou piào bu piàoliang?* Is his girlfriend pretty?
- 中 国 菜 好 吃 不 好 吃 ? *whole word repeated* *Zhōngguó cài hǎochī bu hǎochī?* Is Chinese food good?
- 中 国 菜 好 不 好 吃 ? *only the first character repeated* *Zhōngguó cài hǎo bu hǎochī?* Is Chinese food good?
- 那 个 地 方 好 玩 不 好 玩 ? *whole word repeated* *Nàge dìfang hǎowán bu hǎowán?* Is that place fun?
- 那 个 地 方 好 不 好 玩 ? *only the first character repeated* *Nàge dìfang hǎo bu hǎowán?* Is that place fun?

有 (yǒu) Is a Special Case

Structure

Because the verb 有 (yǒu) is negated with 没 (méi) and not 不 (bù), the structure for affirmative-negative questions with 有 (yǒu) is:

Subj. + 有 没有 + Obj.

The possible answers are: "有 (yǒu)" or "没有 (méiyǒu)."

The questions could be asking about current possession ("Do you have it or not?"), or to ask about [verbs in the past](#) ("Did you do it or not?").

Examples

- 你哥哥有没有女朋友？Nǐ gēge yǒu méiyǒu nǚpéngyou? Does your older brother have a girlfriend?
- 你们有没有孩子？Nǐmen yǒu méiyǒu hái zi? Do you have children?
- 奶奶有没有坐过飞机？Nǎinai yǒu méiyǒu zuò guo fēijī? Has grandma been on a plane?
- 他有没有上过大学？Tā yǒu méiyǒu shàng guo dàxué? Has he been to college?

See also

- [Tag questions with "bu"](#)
- [Yes-no questions with "ma"](#)
- [Offering choices with "haishi"](#)

2.2: Placement of question words

Who, what, when, where, why, and how: these question words are all used when forming questions in Chinese. The important thing to remember is that **word order** is the same in Chinese for questions and statements.

Overview

Common Question Words List

In English, question words are also known as *wh-words*, as the majority of them begin with *wh*:

- 什么 *shénme* what
- 哪里 ` 哪儿 *nǎlǐ, nǎr* where
- 哪个 *nǎge* which
- 谁 *In spoken Chinese, people normally say "shéi," not "shuí"* shéi who
- 什么时候 *shénme shíhou* when
- 为什么 *wèishénme* why
- 怎么 *zěnmehow*
- 多少 *duōshao* how many / how much

Rules

In English, question words have to be placed at the beginning of the sentence. This involves changing the **word order** to allow this rearrangement. In Chinese, using question words is a lot simpler. You simply place a question word in the place of the thing you want to ask about. *Nothing needs to be rearranged.*

So if the statement is

- 我是 小李 ° *Wǒ shì Xiǎo Lǐ* I am Xiao Li.

the question form - "who are you?" - has the same word order:

- 你是 谁? *Nǐ shì shéi?* Who are you? (you are who?)

This works for whatever it is you want to ask about. The question form has the same word order as the statement form.

Expressing "What" with 什么 (*shénme*)

Structure

Subj. + Verb + 什么 + (Noun) ?

Examples

- **A:** 这是 什么? *Zhè shì shénme?* What is this?
- **B:** 这是 我的 *iPad* ° *Zhè shì wǒ de iPad.* This is my iPad.
- **A:** 你 喜欢 吃 什么 菜? *Nǐ xǐhuan chī shénme cài?* What kind of food do you like?
- **B:** 我 喜欢 吃 中国 菜 ° *Wǒ xǐhuan chī Zhōngguó cài.* I like Chinese food.
- **A:** 你 用 什么 手机? *Nǐ yòng shénme shǒujī?* What kind of cell phone do you use?
- **B:** 我 用 *iPhone* ° *Wǒ yòng iPhone.* I use an iPhone.

- **A:**你在看什么书? Nǐ zài kàn *shénme* shū? What kind of book are you reading?
- **B:**我在看小说° Wǒ zài kàn *xiǎoshuō*. I am reading a novel.
- **A:**他开什么车? Tā kāi *shénme* chē? What kind of car does he drive?
- **B:**他开宝马° Tā kāi *Bǎomǎ*. He drives a BMW.

Expressing "Where" with 哪里 (nǎlǐ) / 哪儿 (nǎr)

The words 哪里 (nǎlǐ) and 哪儿 (nǎr) mean the same thing. The difference is simply regional preference: 哪里 (nǎlǐ) is preferred in the south (Shanghai, Taiwan), whereas 哪儿 (nǎr) is preferred in the north (Beijing, Xi'an).

Structure

Subj. + Verb + 哪里 / 哪儿 ?

Examples

- **A:**你在哪里? Nǐ zài *nǎlǐ*? Where are you?
- **B:**我在家° Wǒ zài *jiā*. I'm at home.
- **A:**你要去哪儿? Nǐ yào qù *nǎr*? Where are you going now?
- **B:**我要去洗手间° Wǒ yào qù *xǐshǒujiān*. I'm going to the bathroom.
- **A:**我们在哪儿? Wǒmen zài *nǎr*? Where are we?
- **B:**我们在南京西路° Wǒmen zài *Nánjīng Xī Lù*. We are at West Nanjing road.
- **A:**这个周末你想去哪儿? Zhège zhōumò nǐ xiǎng qù *nǎr*? Where do you want to go this weekend?
- **B:**我想去公园° Wǒ xiǎng qù *gōngyuán*. I want to go to the park.
- **A:**你好, 你要去哪儿? Nǐhǎo, nǐ yào qù *nǎr*? Hello, where do you want to go?
- **B:**我要去外滩° Wǒ yào qù *Wàitān*. I want to go to the Bund.

Expressing "Which" with 哪个 (nǎge)

Structure

Subj. + Verb + 哪个 (+ Noun) ?

Examples

- **A:**你要哪个? Nǐ yào *nǎge*? Which one do you want?
- **B:**我要这个° Wǒ yào *zhège*. I want this one.
- **A:**你喜欢哪个菜? Nǐ xǐhuan *nǎge cài*? Which dish do you like?
- **B:**我喜欢这个菜° Wǒ xǐhuan *zhège cài*. I like this dish.
- **A:**我们去哪个饭店? Wǒmen qù *nǎge fàndiàn*? Which restaurant are we going to?
- **B:**我们去你妈妈的饭店° Wǒmen qù *nǐ māma de fàndiàn*. We are going to your mom's restaurant.
- **A:**你在哪个房间? Nǐ zài *nǎge fángjiān*? Which room are you in?
- **B:**我在你的房间° Wǒ zài *nǐ de fángjiān*. I'm in your room.
- **A:**你住在哪个区? Nǐ zhù zài *nǎge qū*? Which district do you live in?
- **B:**我住在静安区° Wǒ zhù zài *Jìng'ān Qū*. I live in Jing'an District.

Expressing "Who" with 谁 (shéi)

Structure

Subj. + 是 + 谁 ?

谁 + Verb ?

Examples

- **A:** 你是谁 ? Nǐ shì shéi? Who are you?
- **B:** 我是他女朋友 ° Wǒ shì tā nǚpéngyou. I'm his girlfriend.
- **A:** 她是谁 ? Tā shì shéi? Who is she?
- **B:** 她是我的老师 ° Tā shì wǒ de lǎoshī. She's my teacher.
- **A:** 你不喜欢谁 ? Nǐ bù xǐhuan shéi? Who do you not like?
- **B:** 我不喜欢我的老板 ° Wǒ bù xǐhuan wǒ de lǎobǎn. I don't like my boss.
- **A:** 谁想去 ? Shéi xiǎng qù? Who wants to go?
- **B:** 我想去 ° Wǒ xiǎng qù. I want to go.
- **A:** 谁想喝咖啡 ? Shéi xiǎng hē kāfēi? Who wants to drink coffee?
- **B:** 我想喝咖啡 ° Wǒ xiǎng hē kāfēi. I want to drink coffee.

Expressing "When" with 什么时候 (shénme shíhou)

Structure

Subj. + 什么时候 + Predicate ?

Examples for asking and telling *when* (to keep things simple, we'll just include questions about the future; asking questions about the past can be slightly more complicated and may involve the "[shi... de](#)" construction).

Examples

- **A:** 你什么时候来 ? Nǐ shénme shíhou lái? When are you coming?
- **B:** 我明天来 ° Wǒ míngtiān lái. I'm coming tomorrow.
- **A:** 你们什么时候走 ? Nǐmen shénme shíhou zǒu? When are you guys leaving?
- **B:** 我们下个月走 ° Wǒmen xià gè yuè zǒu. We're leaving next month.
- **A:** 我们什么时候吃饭 ? Wǒmen shénme shíhou chīfàn? When are we eating?
- **B:** 我们6点吃饭 ° Wǒmen liù diǎn chīfàn. We're eating at 6:00.
- **A:** 爸爸什么时候回来 ? Bàba shénme shíhou huílái? When is dad coming back?
- **B:** 爸爸周末回来 ° Bàba zhōumò huílái. Dad is coming back this weekend.
- **A:** 你的飞机什么时候到上海 ? Nǐ de fēijī shénme shíhou dào Shànghǎi? When is your airplane arriving in Shanghai?
- **B:** 晚上八点 ° Wǎnshàng bā diǎn. Eight o'clock this evening.

Expressing "Why" with 为什么 (wèishénme)

Structure

Subj. + 为什么 + Predicate ?

Examples

- **A:**你为什么学中文? *Nǐ wèishénme xué Zhōngwén?* Why do you study Chinese?
- **B:**因为我在 中国 工作 ° *Yīnwèi wǒ zài Zhōngguó gōngzuò.* Because I'm working in China.
- **A:**他们为什么不喝咖啡? *Tāmen wèishénme bù hē kāfēi?* Why don't you drink coffee?
- **B:**因为咖啡很苦 ° *Yīnwèi kāfēi hěn kǔ.* Because coffee is bitter.
- **A:**他为什么不来? *Tā wèishénme bù lái?* Why isn't he coming?
- **B:**因为他很忙 ° *Yīnwèi tā hěn máng.* Because he is busy.
- **A:**你早上为什么不在? *Nǐ zǎoshang wèishénme bù zài?* Why were you not here this morning?
- **B:**因为我出去见朋友了 ° *Yīnwèi wǒ chūqù jiàn péngyou le.* Because I went out to meet some friends.
- **A:**这些外国人为什么不 喜欢 中国? *Zhèxiē wàiguó rén wèishénme bù xǐhuan Zhōngguó?* Why do these foreigners not like China?
- **B:**因为中国人太多 ° *Yīnwèi Zhōngguó rén tài duō.* Because China has a lot of people.

Expressing "How" with 怎么 (zěnmě)

Structure

Subj. + 怎么 + Verb (+ Obj.) ?

Examples

- **A:**你怎么学习 中文? *Nǐ zěnmě xué Zhōngwén?* How do you study Chinese?
- **B:**我用 *Grammar Wiki* 学习 中文 ° *Wǒ yòng Grammar Wiki xué Zhōngwén.* I use the Grammar Wiki to study Chinese.
- **A:**你怎么上网? *Nǐ zěnmě shàngwǎng?* How do you go online?
- **B:**我用手机上网 ° *Wǒ yòng shǒujī shàngwǎng.* I use my cell phone to go online.
- **A:**你怎么去 北京? *Nǐ zěnmě qù Běijīng?* How do you go to Beijing?
- **B:**我坐火车去 ° *Wǒ zuò huǒchē qù.* I take the train.
- **A:**你们怎么回家? *Nǐmen zěnmě huíjiā?* How are you guys going to get home?
- **B:**我开车回家 ° *Wǒ kāichē huíjiā.* I'm driving home.
- **A:**你怎么买票? *Nǐ zěnmě mǎi piào?* How do you buy tickets?
- **B:**我上网买票 ° *Wǒ shàngwǎng mǎi piào.* I go online to buy tickets.

See also

- [Word order](#)
- [Affirmative-negative questions](#)
- [Yes-no questions with "ma"](#)

2.3: Tag questions with "bu"

In the same way you can [tag questions with 吗 \(ma\)](#), tag questions can also be formed using 不 (bù). This is done by putting an [affirmative-negative question](#) at the end of a sentence.

Structure

Verb + 不 + Verb

This can then be attached to the end of a sentence to form a tag question. Tag questions seek confirmation or acceptance of what has been said. In English, "right?" and "OK?" are often used as tag questions.

Examples

- 你会说中文，对不对？Nǐ huì shuō Zhōngwén, *duì bu duì*? You speak Chinese, right?
- 他是你的老板，对不对？Tā shì nǐ de lǎobǎn, *duì bu duì*? He's your boss, right?
- 我们是好朋友，对不对？Wǒmen shì hǎo péngyou, *duì bu duì*? We are good friends, right?
- 你昨天没回家，对不对？Nǐ zuótiān méi huíjiā, *duì bu duì*? You didn't come back home yesterday, right?
- 你有新女朋友了，是不是？Nǐ yǒu xīn nǚpéngyou le, *shì bu shì*? You have a new girlfriend, right?
- 九点开会，是不是？Jiǔ diǎn kāihuì, *shì bu shì*? We are going to hold a meeting at 9, right?
- 你姓王，是不是？Nǐ xìng Wáng, *shì bu shì*? Your last name is Wang, is it not?
- 我们回家吧，好不好？Wǒmen huíjiā ba, *hǎo bu hǎo*? Let's go home, OK?
- 周末去看电影，好不好？Zhōumò qù kàn diànyǐng, *hǎo bu hǎo*? Let's go to a movie this weekend, OK?
- 你们明天来，好不好？Nǐmen míngtiān lái, *hǎo bu hǎo*? You come here tomorrow, OK?

See also

- [Yes-no questions with "ma"](#)
- [Tag questions with "ma"](#)
- [Affirmative-negative questions](#)

2.4: Tag questions with "ma"

As well as [yes/no questions](#), you can also form tag questions with 吗 (ma). Tag questions are quick questions that are tagged on the end of a sentence to ask for confirmation. In English, this is often done with "right?" or negatively with "isn't it?"

The easiest way to do this in Chinese is to add some kind of confirmation word and 吗 (ma) on the end of the sentence.

Structure

As you can see below, the pattern typically involves words like 好 (hǎo), 对 (duì), 是 (shì), or 可以 (kěyǐ), followed by 吗 (ma).

……，好 / 对 / 是 / 可以 + 吗？

By placing these on the end of a sentence, you can soften a suggestion or request confirmation.

Examples

- 这样做，对吗？Zhèyàng zuò, duì ma? Do it like this, right?
- 你们见过，对吗？Nǐmen jiàn guo, duì ma? You've met, right?
- 他们昨天都没去，是吗？Tāmen zuótiān dōu méi qù, shì ma? They didn't go yesterday, right?
- 你没来过，是吗？Nǐ méi lái guo, shì ma? You haven't been here, right?
- 你喜欢我妹妹，是吗？Nǐ xǐhuan wǒ mèimei, shì ma? You like my younger sister, huh?
- 我们去你家，好吗？Wǒmen qù nǐ jiā, hǎo ma? Let's go to your place, OK?
- 不要告诉他，好吗？Bùyào gàosu tā, hǎo ma? Don't tell him, OK?
- 今天我们都不喝酒，好吗？Jīntiān wǒmen dōu bù hējiǔ, hǎo ma? Let's all not drink alcohol today, OK?
- 我现在想去洗手间，可以吗？Wǒ xiànzài xiǎng qù xǐshǒujiān, kěyǐ ma? I want to go to the bathroom now. Is that OK?
- 妈妈，我要吃巧克力，可以吗？Māma, wǒ yào chī qiǎokèlì, kěyǐ ma? Mom, I want to eat chocolate. May I?

See also

- [Yes-no questions with "ma"](#)
- [Tag questions with "bu"](#)
- [Questions with "ne"](#)

2.5: Yes-no questions with "ma"

The question particle 吗 (ma) is a simple way to form questions in Chinese. By placing 吗 (ma) on the end of a statement, you convert it into a *yes/no question* (questions that could be answered with "yes" or "no" in English).

Basic Usage

Structure

Any statement can be converted into a yes/no question with 吗 (ma). You could think of 吗 (ma) as being like a question mark you say out loud. So the basic structure is:

[Statement] + 吗 ?

Examples

- 你喜欢咖啡 吗 ? *statement* Nǐ xǐhuan kāfēi. You like coffee.

The sentence "You like coffee" can easily be converted into the question "Do you like coffee?" by adding 吗 (ma):

- 你喜欢咖啡 吗 ? *question* Nǐ xǐhuan kāfēi *ma*? Do you like coffee?

More examples of yes/no questions that revert to statements when you remove the 吗 (ma):

- 你是大学生 吗 ? *question* Nǐ shì dàxuéshēng *ma*? Are you a college student?
- 他是老板 吗 ? *question* Tā shì lǎobǎn *ma*? Is he the boss?
- 你喜欢她 吗 ? *question* Nǐ xǐhuan tā *ma*? Do you like her?
- 你想家 吗 ? *question* Nǐ xiǎng jiā *ma*? Do you miss home?
- 你们明天见面 吗 ? *question* Nǐmen míngtiān jiànmiàn *ma*? Are you going to meet tomorrow?
- 你们也去 吗 ? *question* Nǐmen yě qù *ma*? Are you also going?
- 他在你们学校学中文 吗 ? *question* Tā zài nǐmen xuéxiào xué Zhōngwén *ma*? Does he study Chinese in your school?
- 妈妈会做饭 吗 ? *question* Māma huì zuòfàn *ma*? Does mom know how to cook?

It's important to remember that you do not normally add 吗 (ma) to a sentence that's *already a question*. For example:

- 你是谁 吗 ? *question* 谁 (shéi) *is a question word* Nǐ shì shéi *ma*?
- 这是不是书 吗 ? *question* 是不是 (shì bu shì) *is a question pattern* Zhè shì bu shì shū *ma*?

These would be something like "Are you who are you?" and "Is this is a book?" in English, both obviously ungrammatical. Still, if you're not careful, you may find yourself throwing a 吗 (ma) onto the end of a question that doesn't need it. Many learners make this mistake, so don't worry if it happens every once in a while, just catch it and remember it the next time.

How to Answer

You can answer a Chinese yes-no question in one of two ways:

- Answer with 对 (duì) or the more casual 嗯 (èn) to affirm what was asked.
- Answer a clearer "yes" by simply repeating the positive form of the verb, or "no" by using the negative form of the verb.

Here's the slightly tricky part: if you answer with 对 (duì) and the question is in the *positive*, then you're saying "**yes**" (and affirming the *positive* verb in the question). If you answer with 对 (duì) and the question is in the *negative*, then you're saying "**no**" (and affirming the *negative* verb in the question). Let's take a look at some examples of this sort.

- A:** 你是大学生 吗 ? *Positive verb in the question* Nǐ shì dàxuéshēng *ma*? Are you a college student?

- **B:** 对 ° 对 (*duì*) *affirms the positive verb.* Duì. Yes, I am.
- **A:** 你没有工作吗? *Negative verb in the question* Nǐ méiyǒu gōngzuò ma? Do you not have a job?
- **B:** 对 ° 对 (*duì*) *affirms the negative verb.* Duì. No, I don't.

Now let's try some answers that reuse the verb for a super-clear "yes" or "no," which works the same way regardless of whether it's a positive or a negative verb in the question.

- **A:** 你明天不来吗? *Negative verb in the question* Nǐ míngtiān bù lái ma? You're not coming tomorrow?
- **B:** 来 ° *Repeat the verb for greater clarity.* Lái. Yes, I'll come.
- **A:** 你明天不来吗? *Negative verb in the question* Nǐ míngtiān bù lái ma? You're not coming tomorrow?
- **B:** 不来 ° *The negative verb means "no."* Bù lái. No, I won't come.

Finally, a mix of the two ways to answer, where one person is asking questions of two different people.

- **A:** 你喜欢中国菜吗? *Positive verb in the question* Nǐ xǐhuan Zhōngguó cài ma? Do you like Chinese food?
- **B:** 喜欢 ° *Repeat the verb for greater clarity.* Xǐhuan. Yes, I do.
- **A:** 你不喜欢中国菜吗? *Negative verb in the question* Nǐ bù xǐhuan Zhōngguó cài ma? Don't you like Chinese food?
- **C:** 对 ° 对 (*duì*) *affirms the negative verb.* Duì. No. (I don't.)

You sometimes hear that "yes" in Chinese is 是 (*shì*) and "no" is 不是 (*bù shì*). This can be true, but *only when the main verb in the question is also 是 (shì)*. If the verb in the question is something else, like 喜欢 (*xǐhuan*), then that verb becomes the word for "yes." It's been said that Chinese has hundreds of ways to say "yes," and this is why: *every verb can be used to mean "yes."*

More Advanced Usage

However, this doesn't mean that a sentence *can't ever* have a question word and 吗 (*ma*). If a sentence contains verbs of understanding such as 知道 (*zhīdào*), 了解 (*liǎojiě*), 明白 (*míngbai*), 认识 (*rènshi*), etc., then 吗 (*ma*) can still be added at the end of the question. You will later learn more about these [advanced yes-no questions with "ma"](#).

See also

- [Tag questions with "ma"](#)
- [Affirmative-negative questions](#)
- [Questions with "ne"](#)

3: COMPARISONS OF SIMILAR GRAMMAR POINTS

What's the difference between this grammar point and that grammar point? Check here.

Numbers

Grammar Point (English)	Pattern	Examples
Comparing "er" and "liang"	二 vs 两	两个人 ° 二十 二 °

3.1: Comparing "er" and "liang"

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3.1: Comparing "er" and "liang"

In Chinese, there are two words for "two." They are 二 (èr) and 两 (liǎng), and each is used in different circumstances.

Uses of 二 (èr)

二 (èr) Is for Numbers

The digit "2" is 二 (èr). This is used generally in numbers, when counting to ten, giving out a phone number, and so on.

Unlike 两 (liǎng), 二 (èr) is not used to say there are "two" of something, and does not generally occur with [measure words](#) by itself. Numbers like 十二 (12) (shí'èr) and 二十二 (22) (èrshí-èr) end with a "2" and can still be combined with measure words. In those cases, 两 (liǎng) is not needed.

Examples

Here are some common examples of 二 (èr) in action:

- 第二 dì-èr#2; second
- 第二个 dì-èr gè the second one
- 第二次 dì-èr cì the second time
- 二月 Èryuè February (the second month)
- 二号 èr hào#2; the second (of the month)
- 号线 èr hào xiàn Line 2 (of the metro)
- 二楼 èr lóu second floor
- 十二 shí'èr 12
- 二十 èrshí 20
- 十二块钱 shí'èr kuài qián 12 RMB
- 二十块钱 èrshí kuài qián 20 RMB
- 二十个人 èrshí-èr gè rén twenty-two people

Uses of 两 (liǎng)

两 (liǎng) Is for Measure Words

When specifying quantities (and using [measure words](#) to do it), 两 (liǎng) is used. This is when you want to say "two of something" or "both."

Here are some common examples of 两 (liǎng) in action:

Examples

- 两个小时 liǎng gè xiǎoshí two hours
- 两点 liǎng diǎn 2 o'clock
- 两天 liǎng tiān two days
- 两个星期 liǎng gè xīngqī two weeks
- 两个月 liǎng gè yuè two months
- 两年 liǎng nián two years
- 两次 liǎng cì two times / twice
- 两块钱 liǎng kuài qián 2 kuai / 2 RMB
- 两百 *note: 二百 (èrbǎi) is also acceptable.* liǎngbǎi 200
- 两千 liǎng qiān 2,000

- 我两个都要 ° Wǒ liǎng gè dōu yào. I want both of them.

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