

# Introduction to Pinyin

---

Syllabic Structure, Pinyin, and  
Pronunciation

by Hua-Fu Liu

# Hanyu Pinyin (Pinyin)

---

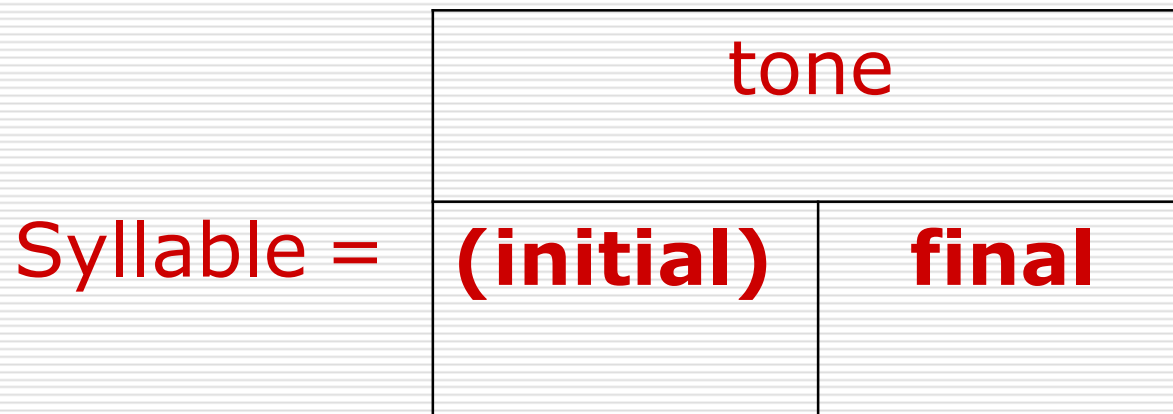
- ❑ It's the official Romanization system of Mandarin in China (1958)
  - ❑ It's a pronunciation tool for language learners
  - ❑ It's in index systems (library catalogs, dictionaries, etc.)
  - ❑ It's a method for putting Chinese characters into a computer
  - ❑ It's in the non-Chinese media (for news, textbooks, places, etc.)
-

# Syllabic Structure and Pronunciation of Modern Standard Mandarin (Basics p.2)

---

A syllable of Modern Standard Mandarin is usually composed of three parts:

- An initial consonant
- A final consisting of vowels or vowels and ending consonants  $-[n]$  or  $-[ng]$
- A tone (the tone is superimposed on the entire syllable)



# Simple Finals (Basics p.2)

---

a, o, e, i, u, ü

---

# Special Simple Final “i”

(Textbook Basics P.3)

---

- *i* with z-, c-, s-, zh-, ch-, sh- and r-, is a special case of the i final. It does not sound like the i in ji, qi, and xi but is rather a vowel continuation of the preceding consonant.

bi, pi, mi, fi, di, ti, ni, li, ji, qi, xi

zi, ci, si, zhi, chi, shi, ri

---

# Initials (Basics p.3)

---

1. b p m f

2. d t n l

3. g k h

4. j q x

5. z c s

6. zh ch sh r

---

# Compound Finals

(Textbook Basics p.7)

---

1. ai ei ao ou
  2. an en ang eng ong
  3. ia iao ie iu (iou) ian in  
iang ing iong
  4. ua uo uai ui (uei) uan un  
(uen) uang ueng
  5. üe üan ün
  6. er
-

# Pinyin Spelling Rules

(Textbook Basics p. 8)

## 1. uo

- a. After *b-*, *p-*, *m-*, and *f-*, *u* is omitted but *o* is still pronounced as *uo* with a very light *u*. ---> *bo, po, mo, fo*
- b. For all other initials sounds, the *u* remains. (e.g., *duo*)

## 2. ü and u

- a. When used in combination with *j-*, *q-*, and *x-*, the umlaut (two dots) of *ü* are dropped leaving simply *ju, qu, and xu*. This applies to the compound finals *üe*, *üan* and *ün* as well. (e.g., *qüe* → *que*; *jüan* → *juan*)
- b. When the final *ü* and the compound finals occur without an initial, the umlaut is dropped and a "y" is added to the front of the syllable (e.g., *ü* → *yu*; *üan* → *yuan*)
- c. With *l-* and *n-* keep the umlaut for both *ü* and *üe*. (e.g., *lü* and *nüe*)
- d. In finals with no initial consonant, *u* is replaced by *w*. (e.g., *uo* → *wo*; *uang* → *wang*)

The exceptions to this rule are: *u* → *wu*    *ui* → *wei*    *un* → *wen*

Note: *w* and *y* should not be considered initials. They are simply used as place-fillers and aids to pronunciation.



# Pinyin Spelling Rules

(Textbook Basics p.8)

---

## 3. *i* and *y*

In finals with no initial consonant, *i* is replaced by *y*. (e.g., *ie* - > *ye* ; *ian* - > *yan*)

The exceptions to this rule are: *i* - > *yi* *in* - > *yin* *ing* - > *ying*

*iu* - > *you*

## 4. The Apostrophe

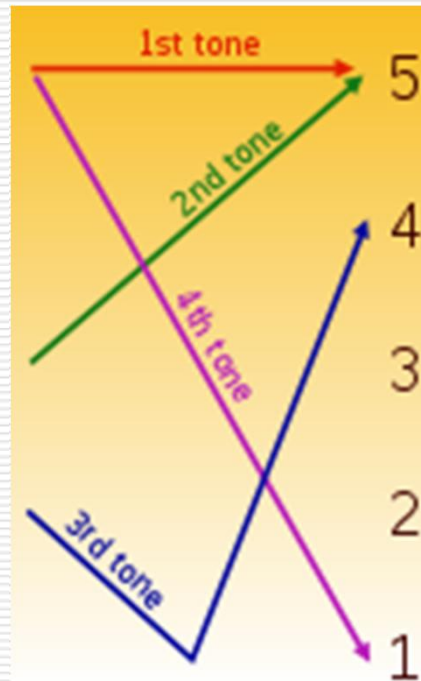
In cases where the end of one syllable and the beginning of the next are both vowels, an apostrophe is used to separate the two syllables in order to avoid confusion. (e.g., *nü* and *er* - > *nǚ'ér* meaning "daughter"; *xi* and *an* - > *xī'ān* is "a city name in China")

---

# TONES (Textbook Basics p.9 & p.10)

---

- four basic tones + a neutral tone



# TONES in Mandarin

(Textbook Basics pp.9-12)

---

- ❑ 1st Tone: High-level (5-5)
  - ❑ 2nd Tone: High-rising (3-5)
  - ❑ 3rd Tone: Low-dipping or Falling-rising (2-1-4)
  - ❑ 4<sup>th</sup>Tone: High-falling or Falling (5-1)
  - ❑ The neutral Tone (5th tone): (1) The first type of the neutral tone is used in sentence particles, such as, “ma”, “ba”, “ne”, “a”. (2) The second type occurs in many disyllabic words, where the tone on the second syllable is converted to a neutral tone as designated by tone change rules.
-

## In Depth: The Neutral Tone (Textbook p.12)

---

- The neutral tone's pitch is determined by the tone of the preceding syllable. The neutral tone will naturally "land" at the pitch that correlated with the tone of the preceding syllable and the speaker does not need to consciously aim for a particular pitch.
  - After 1st: *tā de* (his) (half-low)
  - After 2nd: *lái le* (coming) (middle)
  - After 3<sup>rd</sup>: *yǒu le* (have it) (half-high)
  - After 4th: *duì le* (correct) (low)
-

## How tones affect the meaning of a word

---

妈 麻 马 骂 吗  
mā má m mà ma

---

# In Depth: Tone Sandhi Rules

(Textbook Basics p.11)

---

## □ A third tone preceding another third tone

This rule states that whenever a third-tone syllable is followed by another third-tone syllable, the first syllable's third tone changes to the second tone. (e.g.,  $n\ h\ o \rightarrow n\acute{i}\ h\ o$ )

The rule also applies when more than two third-tone syllables occur in succession. In case such as this, the third tones that changes to the second tones depend on the speech rhythm of the speaker and the closeness of their syntactic structure within the sentence. Syntactically close words will change to a second tone, while the others remain the same. (e.g.,

$w\ y\check{e}\ h\check{e}n\ h\ o \rightarrow w\ y\check{e}\ h\acute{e}n\ h\ o$ )

The  $y\check{e}$  in the revised instance is actually a half third tone.

---

# In Depth:Tone Sandhi Rules

---

## □ The half third tone

This rule states that when a third tone is followed by another tone (first, second, fourth, neutral), it becomes a half third tone, in which the pitch starts at the normal low point (level 2) and descends to the lowest point (level 1) and does not rise to the normal level of a full third tone.

hǎo chī , jiě jué , hěn bàng , jiě jie

---

# In Depth:Tone Sandhi Rules

---

## □ Tone shift: 一 yī and 不 bù

一 yī, the pronunciation of the word “one”, is yī when it stands alone. However, it shifts from its default first tone to either second or fourth tone depending on the tone of the syllable that follows it. When yī precedes a fourth or neutral tone syllable, its tone becomes a second tone, but when it precedes first, second, or the third toned syllables, it takes on a fourth tone.

(e.g., yì bǎi, yí gòng)

不 bù, the negative marker meaning “no” or “not”, has a default fourth tone, but when it precedes another syllable with a fourth tone, it switches to a second tone, (e.g., bù duì → bú duì, which means “incorrect.”)

---



# Tone Marking Rules

(Textbook Basics p.10)

---

□ Simple finals

The tone mark is placed over the vowel. (e.g., *má, shì, w , zhā*)

□ Compound finals

- a. Two-vowel syllables: The tone is placed over the first vowel unless the first vowel is "i" or "u", in which case the tone goes over the second vowel. (e.g., *dài, ch u, fèi, qiū, shuō, jué*)
- b. Three-vowel syllables or finals with three or more letters: The tone goes over the middle vowel or letter. (e.g., *kuài, huái, jì o, liào, chuán, zhuāng, jì ng*)

**Note:** Tone marks are written above the main vowel of a syllable. The main vowel can be identified according to the following sequence: **a-o-e-i-u-ü**. For instance, in "ao" the main vowel is "a". In "ei" the main vowel is "e". There is one exception: when i and u are combined into a syllable, the tone mark is written on the second vowel: **iù, uì**.

---

# Pinyin Pronunciation Online

---

1. Learn Chinese Online — Pinyin — Some hard to articulate  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U72hN\\_g9pss](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U72hN_g9pss)

2. Pinyin ge 拼音歌

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Teomsfl-yIA>

3. Chinese pronunciation (for English speakers)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lvl9wDv7R8g>

4. Pinyin Practice

[www.pinyinpractice.com](http://www.pinyinpractice.com)

---

# Reference:

---

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinyin>

---