Introduction to Phonetics

1 Nǐ hǎo 你好 Hello

Chinese is a tonal and musical language. You will want to use accurate Mandarin to communicate with Chinese. These two preliminary lessons will help you from the very beginning to establish a sound foundation in phonetics. The picturesque Chinese characters, one of the world's oldest written languages still in use today, with more than three thousand years of history, might have seemed quite mysterious to you. These lessons will also tell you how to recognize and write Chinese characters, in a relatively easy manner. In the current lesson, you will learn six basic characters. In addition, you will learn how to say some essential daily expressions. Are you ready? Let's begin.

热身 WARM-UP

Listen to the following syllables. On the lines below, write the numbers of the three syllables that you think are Mandarin. Listen a second time and imitate the Mandarin syllables you hear.

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ 1-01-01

第一部分 PART ONE

一、课文 TEXT

1-01-02

Nǐ hǎo!
A: 你好!

Nǐ hǎo!
B: 你好!

A: Hello!
B: Hello!



LIVEWORKSHEETS

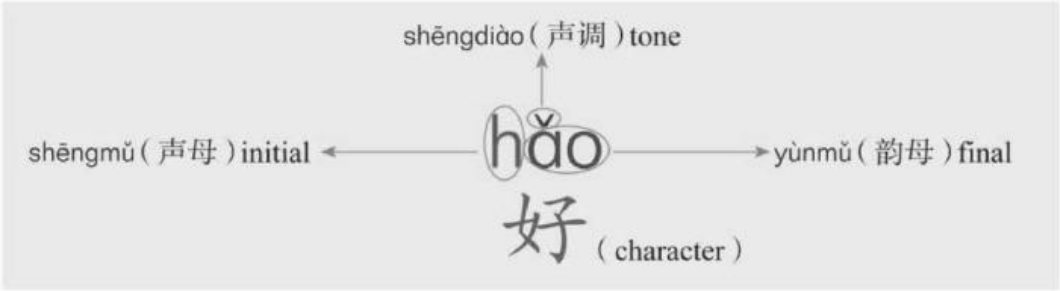
Communication activity

Greet your classmates and teacher in Mandarin.

二、语音 *PHONETICS*

1 语音知识 Knowledge about Phonetics

1. The basic sounds in Mandarin



In Modern Standard Chinese, a syllable usually has three parts: the initial, the final, and the tone. The initial is the consonant at the beginning; the rest of the syllable is the final. A final is made of one to three vowels or a combination of a vowel plus the consonant "n" or "ng" . A tone mark is placed above a vowel. For instance, in the example "hǎo 好" , "h" is the initial, "ao" is the final, and the tone is the third tone. A syllable may not have an initial, such as "ai" , but it must have a final. Altogether Mandarin has 21 initials, 38 finals, and four tones.

The structure of a Hànyǔ pīnyīn syllable is as follows:

syllable =	tone	
	(initial)	final

2. Phonological items

(1) Initials: b, p, m, and f

The initials b, p, and m are bilabial, but f is labiodental. They are pronounced similar to English.

(2) Initials: d, t, n, and l

When pronouncing d, t, n, and l, the tip of the tongue is in the alveolar position. They are pronounced similar to English.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Note:

The initials b and d are unaspirated; p and t are pronounced in the same position as b and d, but they are aspirated.

(3) Single finals: a, o, e, i, u, and ü

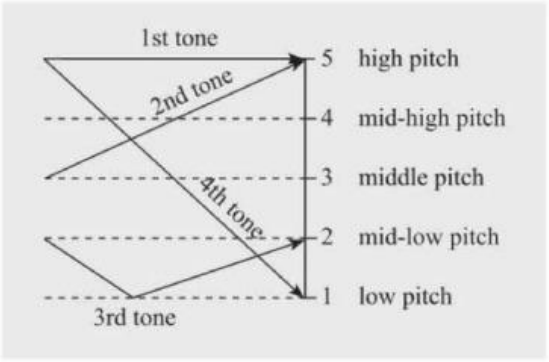
When the final o alone is combined with b, p, m, or f, there is usually a short u in between the initial and the final. So, the actual pronunciation of bo, po, mo, and fo is buo, puo, muo, and fuo.

The *pinyin* final e and the English letter e are pronounced differently. When pronouncing the *pinyin* e, approximate the sound er as in the British English word "her".

The final ü is a rounded high front vowel. When pronouncing it, place your tongue as if you were pronouncing i in pīnyīn and then round your lips.

(4) Tones

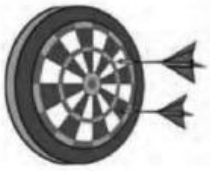
Chinese is a tonal language. Each tone has the function of differentiating meaning. Mandarin has four basic tones.



Example


bā (八)
eight


bá (拔)
to pull out


bǎ (靶)
target


bà (爸)
dad

Tone marks: the first tone is marked " – ", the second tone is marked " ˊ ", the third tone is marked " ˇ ", and the fourth tone is marked " ˋ ".

When a syllable has only one vowel, the tone mark is marked above the vowel such as "lù 陆" and "hěn 很". If the tone mark is above the *pinyin* vowel i, the dot above i should be removed such as "nǐ 你", "nín 您", and " píng 平". When a syllable has a compound final,

LIVEWORKSHEETS

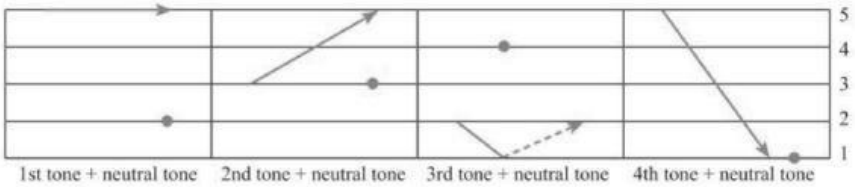
the tone mark should usually be put above the vowel which requires your mouth to be open the widest. When the degree to which you open your mouth is the same, put the tone mark above the second vowel, such as "liú 留" and "duì 对".

The order of vowel sounds based on how wide the mouth is opened:

a o e i u ü

(5) The neutral tone

Mandarin has a neutral tone. The neutral tone must be read lightly and quickly. When spelling the syllable, there is no tone mark.



Example

māma（妈妈）	bóbo（伯伯）	nǐmen（你们）	bàba（爸爸）
mom	uncle	you	dad

2 语音练习 Pronunciation Drills

1-01-03

1. Read aloud and pay attention to the tones

ā	á	ǎ	à
bō	bó	bǒ	bò
lū	lú	lǔ	lù
yī	yí	yǐ	yì
wū	wú	wǔ	wù
yū	yú	yǔ	yù

2. Sound discrimination

bà (father) —— pà (afraid)

bó (uncle) —— pó (mother-in-law)

dà (big) —— tà (to stamp)

dǔ (to bet) —— tǔ (soil)

fǎ (law) —— mǎ (horse)

mò (ink) —— mù (wood)

lì (strength) —— lǜ (green)

nǚ (female) —— nǔ (to exert)

LIVEWORKSHEETS

3. Tone discrimination

mǎ (horse) —— mā (mom)　　mù (wood) —— mǔ (mother)

yī (one) —— yí (aunt)　　lì (strength) —— lǐ (in)

dǔ (to bet) —— dú (to read)　　yǔ (rain) —— yú (fish)

4. The neutral tone

bàba　　māma　　dìdi

bóbo　　pópo　　Nǐ ne?

三、课堂用语 *CLASSROOM EXPRESSIONS*

● Nǐ dú.　　Read aloud.　　1-01-04

第二部分 PART TWO

一、课文 *TEXT*

（一）　1-01-05



Nǐmen hǎo!
A: 你们 好！

Nǐ hǎo!
B: 你 好！

A: Hello, everyone!
B: Hello!

LIVEWORKSHEETS

（二） 1-01-06

Nǐ máng ma?
A： 你 忙 吗？

Hěn máng.
B： 很 忙。

A: Are you busy?
B: Very busy.



Communication activity

Based on the pictures and scenes below, complete the dialogues, using the designated words.







(1) A：_____！
B：_____！

(2) A：_____！
B：_____！

(3) A：Bàba，_____？(máng)
B：_____。(máng)

二、语音 *PHONETICS*

1 语音知识 Knowledge about Phonetics

1. Phonological items

(1) Initials: g, k, and h

When pronouncing g and k, raise the back of the tongue against the soft palate. The initial g is pronounced like "kir" in the English word "skirt".

When pronouncing h, raise the back of the tongue and place it close to the soft palate.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Note:

Though g and k are pronounced in the same position, g is unaspirated and k is aspirated. The initial h in Mandarin is pronounced in a similar position as "h" in English.

(2) Front-sonorant compound finals: ai, ei, ao, and ou

Front-sonorant compound finals are composed of a primary vowel and a secondary vowel. The first vowel is the primary vowel (the tone mark is put above it), the pronunciation is relatively clear and loud, and the length of the sound is longer than the secondary vowel; the length of the secondary vowel is relatively short and the pronunciation is less stressed.

A primary vowel + a secondary vowel: ai, ei, ao, and ou

The final ei is similar to "ay" as in the English word "play" and the final ou is similar to "o" in the English word "so".

(3) Finals with nasal endings: an, en, ang, eng, and ong

A final that ends with n is called a front nasal final; a final that ends with ng is called a back nasal final.

When pronouncing a front nasal final, first pronounce the vowel in the final. Then immediately pronounce n along with the flow of the air. The nasal n is pronounced similar to "n" as in the English word "in".

When pronouncing a back nasal final, first pronounce the vowel in the final. Then immediately pronounce ng along with the flow of the air. The pronunciation of ng is similar to "ng" as in the English word "belong".

2. Third tone sandhi

(1) When appearing on its own, a third tone is fully pronounced.

Example nǐ hǎo mǎ nǔ

(2) When two third tones are read aloud together, the first third tone is read as a second tone, but the tone mark remains the third tone.

ˇ + ˇ ⟶ ˊ + ˇ

Example	nǐ hǎo (hello)	ní hǎo
	hěn hǎo (very good)	hén hǎo
	yǔfǎ (grammar)	yúfǎ
	kěyǐ (all right)	kéyǐ

(3) When a third tone is followed by a first tone, second tone, or fourth tone syllable, or most neutral tones, the third tone is read aloud as a half third tone.

Example hěn gāo (very tall)
hěn bái (very white)
hěn dà (very big)
nǎinai (grandma)

LIVEWORKSHEETS

2 语音练习 Pronunciation Drills

1-01-07

1. Read aloud and pay attention to the tones

nī	ní	nǐ	nì	
hāo	háo	hǎo	hào	nǐ hǎo
mēn	mén		mèn	nǐmen
tā		tǎ	tà	tāmen
	hén	hěn	hèn	
māng	máng	mǎng		hěn máng

2. Sound discrimination

kàn (to look) —— gàn (to do)
fēi (to fly) —— hēi (black)
dāo (knife) —— dōu (all)
fēn (minute) —— fēng (wind)
kǒu (mouth) —— gǒu (dog)
bǎi (hundred) —— běi (north)
tán (to talk) —— táng (sugar)
dōng (east) —— dēng (lamp)

3. Tone discrimination

dāo —— dào
pái —— pài
páng —— pàng (fat)
kàn (to look) —— kǎn (to cut)
hěn (very) —— hèn (to hate)
děng (to wait) —— dēng (lamp)

4. Third-tone sandhi

děng tā	hěn gāo
nǐ máng	hěn máng
nǐ hǎo	hěn hǎo
kělè	hǎokàn
nǎinai	hǎo ma

三、课堂用语 *CLASSROOM EXPRESSIONS*

1-01-08

❶ Hěn hǎo! Very good!
❷ Nǐmen dú. Please read aloud.
❸ Kàn hēibǎn. Look at the blackboard.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

第三部分 PART THREE

一、课文 *TEXT*

(一) 1-01-09

Lǎoshī hǎo!
A: 老师 好!

Nǐmen hǎo!
B: 你们 好!

A: Hello, teacher!
B: Hello, everyone!



(二) 1-01-10

Zhè shì shéi?
A: 这 是 谁?

Zhè shì Chén lǎoshī.
B: 这 是 陈 老师。

A: Who is this person?
B: This is Teacher Chen.



(三) 1-01-11

Nà shì shéi?
A: 那 是 谁?

Nà shì Zhèng lǎoshī.
B: 那 是 郑 老师。

A: Who is that person?
B: That is Teacher Zheng.



LIVEWORKSHEETS

Communication activity

Based on the pictures and scenes below, complete the dialogues, using the designated words.



(1) A：_____！ (nǐmen)

B：_____！



(2) A：_____？ (zhè)

B：_____。 (zhè shì)

A：_____？ (nà)

B：_____。 (nà shì)

二、语音 *PHONETICS*

1 语音知识 Knowledge about Phonetics

(1) Initials: zh, ch, sh, and r

The initial zh is similar to "j" in the English word "jet", but the tip of the tongue curls toward the back a bit, and it is unaspirated.

The initial ch is similar to "ch" in the English word "church", but the tip of the tongue curls toward the back a bit, and it is aspirated.

The initial sh is similar to "sh" in the English word "ship", but the tip of the tongue curls toward the back a bit.

The initial r is similar to "r" in the English word "right" , but when pronouncing r, the lips are flat, and the tip of the tongue curls toward the back a bit. First try to make the sh sound, next vibrate your vocal chords, and then the r sound will be produced.

(2) The final: -i [ɿ]

The -i [ɿ] in zhi, chi, shi, and ri is not pronounced in the same way as the single final i [i]. After pronouncing the aforementioned zh, ch, sh, and r, the tongue remains unmoved.

(3) Finals that begin with u: ua, uo, uai, uei, uan, uen, uang, and ueng

The structure of this group of finals is as follows:

Medial u + the primary vowel	ua, uo, uai, or uei (ui)
Medial u + the nasal final	uan, uen (un), uang, or ueng

LIVEWORKSHEETS

When pronouncing a final that begins with u, first pronounce the sound of "u" as in the English word "youth", then naturally glide to the vowel or the nasal final.

2 语音练习 Pronunciation Drills

1-01-12

1. Read aloud and pay attention to the tones

lāo	láo	lǎo	lào	
shī	shí	shǐ	shì	lǎoshī
chēn	chén	chěn	chèn	Chén lǎoshī
zhēng		zhěng	zhèng	Zhèng lǎoshī
	shéi			shì shéi
	rén	rěn	rèn	lǎorén

2. Sound discrimination

guī —— kuī
chūn —— tūn
zhǐ —— chǐ
wán (to finish) —— wáng (king)
shǔn —— zhǔn
lù (road) —— rù (to enter)
kuài —— kuà
huài (bad) —— huì (can)

3. Tone discrimination

shì (to be) —— shí (ten)
chá (tea) —— chà (poor)
rén (people) —— rèn (to recognize)
shuǐ (water) —— shuí (who)
zhū (pig) —— zhú (bamboo)
wǒ (I) —— wò (to lie down)

4. Practice reading the disyllabic words

shuōhuà (to speak) zhīdào (to know) chídào (late)
shàngwǔ (morning) wǎnshang (evening) rènshi (to know)
Zhōngguó (China) Měiguó (USA) Rìběn (Japan) Hánguó (South Korea)

三、课堂用语 CLASSROOM EXPRESSIONS

1-01-13

❶ Shàngkè le. Let's begin the class.
❷ Gēn wǒ dú. Please repeat after me.
❸ Duì bu duì? Is that right?
❹ Duì le. That's right.
❺ Bú duì. That's not right.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

第四部分 PART FOUR

一、课文 *TEXT*

（一） 1-01-14

Nǐ hē kāfēi ma?
A：你 喝 咖啡 吗？

Wǒ bù hē kāfēi.
B：我 不 喝 咖啡。



A: Do you drink coffee?
B: I don't drink coffee.

（二） 1-01-15

Nǐ hē shénme?
A：你 喝 什么？

Lái yì bēi chá.
B：来 一 杯 茶。



A: What would you like to drink?
B: A cup of tea.

Communication activity

Small group activity: In groups of four, look at the picture on the right, and take turns asking and answering questions regarding what each person wants to drink. Find out the most popular drink in the group, then report your finding to the whole class.



LIVEWORKSHEETS

二、语音 PHONETICS

1 语音知识 Knowledge about Phonetics

1. The tone sandhi of "yī 一" (one)

The original tone of "yī 一" (one) is the first tone. When it appears alone or appears at the end of a word or a sentence, it is read in its original tone. When it is used as an ordinal number (i.e., dì-yī 第一 first), it is also read in its original tone. However, when "yī 一" appears before the first, second, or third tone, the tone is changed to the fourth tone. When it appears before the fourth tone, the tone is changed to the second tone.

yī + (ˉ / ˊ / ˇ) → yì + (ˉ / ˊ / ˇ) Example: yì bēi (a cup of); yì píng (a bottle of); yì běn (a volume, a copy)

yī + ˋ → yí + ˋ Example: yí biàn (once)

2. Summary of the spelling rules (1): Rules for separation of syllables

(1) Spelling rules for i, u, or ü as a syllable itself

When the final i itself is a syllable, or when i that is combined with a nasal consonant n or ng is a syllable, add y before i.

i ⟹ yi Example: i → yi in → yin ing → ying

When a compound final starts with i and this final itself is a syllable, i should be changed to y.

i ⟹ y Example: ia → ya ie → ye ian → yan

When the final u itself is a syllable, add w before u.

u ⟹ wu Example: u → wu

When a compound final starts with u and this final itself is a syllable, u should be changed to w.

u ⟹ w Example: ua → wa uan → wan

When the final ü itself is a syllable, or when a compound final that starts with ü is a syllable, add y before ü, and remove the two dots above ü.

ü ⟹ yu Example: ü → yu üe → yue üan → yuan

(2) The apostrophe

When a syllable starts with the vowel a, o, or e with no initial, an apostrophe is placed before the vowel to separate it from the previous syllable. For example, Tiān'ān Mén 天安门 (Tian'anmen), Xī'ōu 西欧 (Western Europe), and 天鹅 tiān'é (swan).

LIVEWORKSHEETS

3. Brief review of phonetics (1)

(1) Summary of the initials

	Unaspirated Stops	Aspirated Stops	Nasals	Fricatives
Labials	b[p]	p[p‘]	m[m]	f[f]
Blade-Aveolars	d[t]	t[t‘]	n[n]	l[l]
Velars	g[k]	k[k‘]		h[x]
Blade-Palatals	zh[tʂ]	ch[tʂ‘]		sh[ʂ]、r[ʐ]

(2) Summary of the finals

Single finals: a, o, e, i, u, ü, -i[ɿ]

Compound finals: ai, ei, ao, ou, an, en, ang, eng, uai, uei, uan, uen, uang, ueng, ong

(3) The combinations of initials and finals in this lesson

Initials / Finals	b	p	m	f	d	t	n	l	g	k	h	zh	ch	sh	r
a	ba	pa	ma	fa	da	ta	na	la	ga	ka	ha	zha	cha	sha	
o	bo	po	mo	fo											
e			me		de	te	ne	le	ge	ke	he	zhe	che	she	re
i	bi	pi	mi		di	ti	ni	li							
u	bu	pu	mu	fu	du	tu	nu	lu	gu	ku	hu	zhu	chu	shu	ru
ü							nü	lü							
-i[ɿ]												zhi	chi	shi	ri
ai	bai	pai	mai		dai	tai	nai	lai	gai	kai	hai	zhai	chai	shai	
ei	bei	pei	mei	fei	dei	tei	nei	lei	gei	kei	hei	zhei		shei	
ao	bao	pao	mao		dao	tao	nao	lao	gao	kao	hao	zhao	chao	shao	rao
ou		pou	mou	fou	dou	tou	nou	lou	gou	kou	hou	zhou	chou	shou	rou
an	ban	pan	man	fan	dan	tan	nan	lan	gan	kan	han	zhan	chan	shan	ran
en	ben	pen	men	fen	den		nen		gen	ken	hen	zhen	chen	shen	ren
ang	bang	pang	mang	fang	dang	tang	nang	lang	gang	kang	hang	zhang	chang	shang	rang
eng	beng	peng	meng	feng	deng	teng	neng	leng	geng	keng	heng	zheng	cheng	sheng	reng
uai									guai	kuai	huai	zhuai	chuai	shuai	
uei (ui)					dui	tui			gui	kui	hui	zhui	chui	shui	rui
uan					duan	tuan	nuan	luan	guan	kuan	huan	zhuan	chuan	shuan	ruan
uen (un)					dun	tun		lun	gun	kun	hun	zhun	chun	shun	run
uang									guang	kuang	huang	zhuang	chuang	shuang	
ueng															
ong					dong	tong	nong	long	gong	kong	hong	zhong	chong		rong

LIVEWORKSHEETS

(4) Brief summary of the rules for tone sandhi

① The third tone sandhi

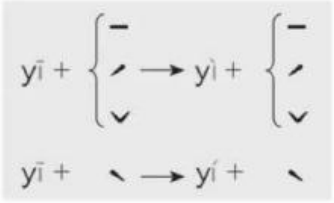
When two third tone syllables are read aloud together, the first third tone changes to the second tone.

ˇ + ˇ → ˊ + ˇ

When a syllable with a third tone appears before the first, second, fourth, and most of the neutral tones, it is read aloud only as a half third tone.



② The tone sandhi of "yī 一" (one)



2 语音练习 Pronunciation Drills

1-01-16

1. Read aloud and pay attention to the tones

kā		kǎ			
fēi	féi	fěi	fèi		kāfēi
shēn	shén	shěn	shèn		
				me	shénme
yī	yí	yǐ	yì		
bēi		běi	bèi		
chā	chá	chǎ	chà		yì bēi chá

2. Sound discrimination

bǐ —— pǐ	duì —— tuì
kě —— gě	shì (to be) —— rì (sun)
zhǐ —— chǐ	zhōng —— chōng
kuài —— kuà	rì —— rè
huān —— huāng	gēn —— gēng
ròu —— ruò	dōu (all) —— duō (many)

LIVEWORKSHEETS