

Mandarin, Step by Step, Character by Character

A composition-driven introduction to standard Mandarin

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Starter edition — seven short lessons in one cumulative chapter.

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How to use this starter edition

Begin with no assumed Chinese. Each section takes one small expression, teaches only the characters and sounds needed for it, shows what those characters are built from, and ends with a short retrieval prompt. There is no character list to memorise first.

Two things about Mandarin will be new to a reader coming from a European language, and this book meets both in its first chapter rather than deferring them. The first is that Chinese is written in *characters*, not letters: each one is an evenly sized block built from smaller recurring components, and words are one or more of those blocks. The second is that *pitch is part of the word*. Said on a high flat note, a falling note, or a low dipping one, the same syllable is three different words. That is not emphasis; it is as much a part of the word as a consonant.

This book is also honest about one thing it cannot do. A related language would let a new word be attached to English words the reader already owns through a shared ancestor — Spanish *gracias* to *grace* and *gratitude*. Chinese and English share no ancestor, so there are no cousins to show, and inventing some would be worse than having none. What replaces them here is the composition of the characters themselves: 好 is 女, woman, beside 子, child. That is a real and visible structure, and it does help — but it anchors a new word to knowledge you are acquiring in the same breath rather than to knowledge you already had, so it is a weaker hook than a shared ancestor would give. Where a component gloss is a traditional memory picture rather than settled history, this book says so.

Romanization (pinyin) stays beside the characters in this starter edition and will fade gradually. The variety taught is standard Mandarin in simplified characters; traditional characters are a labelled future edition, not a silent substitute.

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Chapter 1

Nǐ Hǎo — Hello, Character by Character

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 👁️ eyes (2) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone in Mandarin and answer when greeted, reading both characters unaided and saying the greeting with the tone a speaker actually uses rather than the one the dictionary prints.

A two-line meeting in which both voices say the same word — read from the characters alone, with the first third tone raised by sandhi.

1.1 mā má mǎ mà — one syllable, four words

Nothing to recall yet. Before the first Chinese word arrives, one thing your voice is about to be asked to do that English never asks of it.

The sounds and tones in this word

In English, pitch carries mood. *Really.* and *Really?* are the same word, said two ways.

In Mandarin, **pitch is part of the word**, exactly the way a consonant is. Take the syllable *ma* and give it four different pitches and you get four unrelated words:

- **mā** — held high and flat, one steady note. *Mother.*
- **má** — rising, like the pitch on a surprised English “huh?”. *Hemp.*

- **mǎ** — dipping low, a little creaky. *Horse*.
- **mà** — falling sharply, like a clipped “No!”. *To scold*.

There is a fifth, the **neutral** tone: short, light, no mark written at all. The accent over the vowel is how the romanization writes the tone: a flat bar in **mā**, a rising stroke in **má**, a hook in **mǎ**, a falling stroke in **mà**. The Chinese characters themselves record no tone anywhere, so the accent is a teaching aid, not part of the writing.

Say all four in order now, slowly: **mā, má, mǎ, mà**. [REPEAT x2]

Writing — trace four visible paths

Keep the model visible. With a finger first, then a pencil, trace only the mark above each **a**: **mā, má, mǎ, mà**. Move flat, up, down-then-up, and down. Say the matching pitch while your pencil moves.

Stop after one slow pass. This is not a memory test, and these pinyin marks are not Chinese characters. The next lesson will give your hand its first two-stroke character; this tiny step only lets pitch become a line you can see and follow.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **mā** high and flat, then **mà** falling — hear how far apart they are
- *Answer:* if you change the pitch of a Mandarin syllable, what changes?

Before you move on

Which accent tells you to dip low? (The hook, as in **mǎ**.) Does changing a Mandarin tone change how you feel about a word, or which word it is? (Which word it is.)

Source: the tone inventory this track keeps

1.2 你 — “you”, and the first character

Say the four tones on *ma* once, in order. Hold the third one — low and dipping. The first Chinese word carries exactly that

pitch.

The sounds and tones in this word

nǐ. The *n* is the English *n*; the *i* is the *ee* of “see”. The hook over it is the **third tone**: start low, stay low, let it creak. [REPEAT x2]

Script — 你, and the person hiding on its left

Chinese is not written with letters. It is written with **characters**, each an evenly sized square block, and each block built from smaller recurring pieces called **components**.

你 has two of them, left and right:

亻 + 尔 → 你

亻 is the “person” component. On its own the character for a person is 人 — two legs walking. Push it to the left edge of a block and it is squashed upright into 亻 : one short slant over one vertical. Same piece, standing sideways to make room.

尔 on the right is there for its *sound*, not its meaning. Chinese builds most of its characters this way — one component pointing at the meaning, another at the pronunciation.

Stroke order is a real, taught system here: top before bottom, left before right. So 亻 first, then 尔.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

你 *nǐ* — **you**, addressing one person.

Here this book has to be honest with you. A related language lets a new word be anchored to English words you already own through a shared ancestor — Spanish *gracias* to *grace* and *gratitude*, all from Latin *gratia*. **Chinese shares no ancestor with English.** There is no cousin web for *nǐ*, and inventing one would be worse than having none.

What replaces it is what you just read: the character is itself decomposable, and its pieces mean things. 你 carries a person on its left because it is about a person. That is the hook — not history you share with English, but structure you can see.

Your turn

- *Say it:* 你 — low and dipping, not flat
- *Read it:* 你 — name its left piece, then its right piece

Before you move on

Which component of 你 tells you the word is about a person? (你 .)
Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

1.3 好 — “good”, and what replaces etymology here

Say the word for “you” without looking. Which of its two components is the person? Now hold that low, dipping pitch — the next word wants the same one.

The sounds and tones in this word

hǎo. The *h* is a little rougher than English *h*, scraped at the back of the mouth. The *ao* is one gliding vowel, the *ow* of “how”. The hook accent is the same third tone you already met: low, dipping, creaky. [REPEAT x2]

Script — 好, a woman beside a child

Two components again, side by side:

女 + 子 → 好

女 on the left is the character for “woman”: a crossing stroke, a curved leg, a horizontal through the middle. 子 on the right is “child”: a hooked top, a hooked vertical, a horizontal arm. Left before right, as always.

Notice what just happened. 女 and 子 are not letters spelling out the sound *hǎo* — neither is pronounced anything like it. They are whole characters with their own meanings, reused as building blocks.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

好 *hǎo* — **good**, and also **well**.

A woman beside a child, and the character means “good”. That picture is the hook — and it stands in for the cousin web that a related language would supply, because **Chinese and English share no ancestor** and there is no honest chain from *hǎo* to any English word. Two cautions, because a memory aid that pretends to be history rots:

- “Woman + child = good” is the **traditional gloss**. It is genuinely useful for remembering the shape, but palaeographers do not all accept it as the historical origin; some read 子 as a phonetic element instead. A picture that helps, not a proven derivation.
- Component glosses are hooks, not translations. 好 does not “mean” woman-child. It means good.

Your turn

- *Say it*: 好 — low and dipping, the *ow* of “how”
- *Read it*: 好 — name its left component, then its right one
- *Answer*: why does this track use component pictures instead of English cousins?

Before you move on

What does 好 mean? (Good, or well.) Is its woman-and-child picture a proven etymology? (No — a traditional and useful gloss, disputed as history.)

Source: Unicode Han database, character 好

1.4 你好 — the greeting, assembled from two things you already have

Two characters, both already yours. Say the one that means “you”. Say the one that means “good”. Now put them in that order and you have said hello — but say it slowly for one more moment, because the tones are about to do something.

The exchange

你好 *nǐ hǎo!* Hello.

你好 *nǐ hǎo!* Hello.

The greeting and its answer are the same word. Say it to one person you have just met, at any hour of the day.

Grammar Lens — a word can be more than one character

English counts a word in **letters**. Chinese does not have letters, so the tempting guess is that it counts a word in **characters** — one character, one word. That guess is wrong, and correcting it early saves a great deal of confusion.

A character writes one **syllable** and usually one **meaningful piece**. A **word** is one or more of those pieces:

- 你 — one character, one word: *you*
- 好 — one character, one word: *good*
- 你好 — two characters, still **one word**: *hello*

Nobody hearing 你好 parses it as “you good”, any more than an English speaker hears “good” and “bye” inside *goodbye*. The pieces are visible, which makes the word easy to remember; the whole is what it means.

Why it’s said this way

你好 is safe, neutral, and understood everywhere — which is exactly why a course teaches it first. But it is worth knowing that it is used less freely than English “hello”. Between people who already know each other, a Mandarin speaker is more likely to open with a small situational remark than with 你好 at all. Reserve it for meeting someone, and you will sound right.

Your turn

- Say it: **nǐ hǎo** — greeting someone you have just met
- Say it: **nǐ hǎo** — answering that same greeting

- *Answer:* how many characters is this word, and how many words is it?

Before you move on

Which character comes first, and what does it mean on its own?
(你, “you”.) Is 你好 one word or two? (One.)
Source: Unicode Han database, characters 你 and 好

1.5 ní hǎo — why the greeting is not said the way it is written

Say the greeting once, slowly, giving both syllables the low dipping third tone you were taught. It should feel awkward in the mouth. That awkwardness is the whole lesson.

Grammar Lens — one rule, and it is not optional

When two third tones come one after the other, the first is spoken as a second (rising) tone.

So the greeting, written **nǐ hǎo**, is actually said **ní hǎo** — the first syllable climbs instead of dipping. [REPEAT x2]

Nothing about this shows in the writing. Dictionaries print **nǐ hǎo**, because that is the citation tone each word carries on its own, and the characters 你好 never change at all. A learner who trusts only what is written will say the commonest greeting in the language wrong every time.

Why does it happen? Two dipping tones in a row would need the voice to sink, climb, sink and climb again inside a fifth of a second. Speakers do not do that; the first one gives way. This is a real rule of the sound system, not a sloppy shortcut, and every native speaker applies it without thinking.

Compare it to what English does with “*the*”: written one way, said *thuh* before a consonant and *thee* before a vowel, and no English speaker thinks of that as two words. The difference is that here the change lands on **pitch** — the same property that distinguishes one word from another.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **ní hǎo** — first syllable rising, second dipping

- *Say it*: it again, at speaking speed, without the pause between them
- *Answer*: which spelling changes when the rule applies — pinyin, characters, or neither?

Before you move on

Two third tones meet. What happens to the first? (It rises.) What happens to the characters? (Nothing.)
Source: Chinese Text Project, on tone in Mandarin

1.6 好 again — proof, on a character you own, that tone is the word

Name the character built from a woman and a child, and say what it means. Hold its tone: low and dipping.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

The very same character, 好, has a second reading — and the only thing that separates the two is the tone:

- 好 *hǎo*, dipping third tone — **good**
- 好 *hào*, sharply falling fourth tone — **to be fond of, to like**

Same strokes. Same components. Same shape on the page. Two words. This is the cleanest proof available of what the first lesson claimed. Tone is not decoration on a word; it is *inside* the word, doing the job a consonant does in English. Change *hǎo* to *hào* and you have not said “good” with feeling — you have said a different word, the way *bat* and *pat* are different words.

The two readings are related in meaning, and the relation is a good hook: what is **good** is what one is **fond of**. That is a link inside Chinese, between two readings of one character. It is not a link to English. There is none.

You are not asked to produce **hào** yet. Recognising it is the point: when a familiar character turns up wearing an unfamiliar tone, the tone is telling you this is a different word.

Your turn

- *Answer:* **hǎo** or **hào** — which one means “good”?
- *Answer:* what changed between them, and what stayed the same?
- *Answer:* which two components is this character built from?

Before you move on

One character carried two words today. What told them apart?
(Only the tone.)

Source: Unicode Han database, character 好

1.7 Practice — greet someone, and be greeted back

Retrieve the two words separately first: the one meaning “you”, then the one meaning “good”. Do not run them together yet.

The exchange

A: 你好 *nǐ hǎo*! B: 你好 *nǐ hǎo*!

Two lines, one word, both voices. Every piece is already yours: the characters from their own lessons, the meaning from the greeting lesson, the rising first syllable from the sandhi rule. Nothing new is hiding here.

Say A’s line, pause, then answer as B. [REPEAT x2]

What you’ve built this chapter

Four things, and only one of them is vocabulary:

- 你 is 亻 plus 尔; 好 is 女 beside 子. Characters are built from parts.
- Those parts are the memory hook this track uses, because Chinese and English share no ancestor and therefore no cousin web.
- 你好 is two characters and one word. Characters are not letters.
- Pitch is part of the word, and a neighbouring word can change it

without changing a stroke.

Your turn

- *Say it:* greet someone you have just met
- *Say it:* answer that greeting
- *Read it:* 你好 aloud from the characters alone, with no pinyin

Before you move on

Run both lines once more. If the first syllable dips instead of rising, go back to the sandhi lesson only — not to the whole chapter.

Source: Unicode Han database, characters 你 and 好

Chapter 2

Reading the Greeting — One Piece at a Time

Modes: ✓ pen (7) ⇌ Hands-free start: none of the 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write each component the greeting's two characters are built from, and then assemble both characters from those pieces rather than recalling them as whole shapes.

The second assembly, built from two components the reader wrote individually a moment earlier — and a caution that the memorable story about why it means what it means is a story, not a source.

2.1 人 — two strokes, and a person walking

You have heard Mandarin pitch. Now you meet the writing, and this book will hand it to you **one piece at a time** — never a character you have not been shown the parts of first.

This is the whole first piece:

人

Two strokes. That is the entire character.

Script — the shape

人 *rén* means **person**.

Look at it before you read another word about it. A stroke leaning down-left, a stroke leaning down-right, meeting at the top. **It is a figure standing on two legs, seen from the side.** You are not being asked to take that on faith — the oldest surviving forms of this character, scratched into ox bone three thousand years ago, are recognisably a standing person, and the two legs are the part that lasted.

Write it in this order, and the order is not a suggestion:

1. the **left** stroke, from the top down to the lower left — a falling sweep
2. the **right** stroke, starting near the top of the first and pressing down to the lower right

Left before right. Almost every character you meet will obey it, and it is worth meeting here — on a character with two strokes — rather than later on one with fifteen.

The pitch is **second tone**: *rén* rises, like the end of an English question.

Your turn — copy with the model visible

Keep 人 visible. Point to the left stroke, then the right. Copy the character once immediately below the model: left stroke first, then right. Say *rén* as you finish it, and compare the meeting point at the top before moving on.

This is guided copy, not a memory test. One careful copy is enough.

Before you move on

Which stroke goes first — the one leaning left, or the one leaning right? (The **left**.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

2.2 亻 — the same person, standing sideways

Write the two-stroke character for *person* once, from memory. Left stroke, then right.

Script — one character, two postures

Every Chinese character is written inside an **evenly sized square block** — whether it has two strokes or twenty, it occupies the same footprint. That one fact drives everything you are about to see.

Because when two pieces have to share a block, one of them must get out of the way. Here is what *person* looks like when it moves to the left edge to make room:

𠂆

Still two strokes. Still the same piece. But the wide-legged stance has been pulled upright into **one short slant on top of one long vertical**, narrow enough that something else can sit beside it.

This is not a different character. It is the same one, squashed. Chinese does this constantly, and the squashed forms are called **components**. When you see 𠂆 at the left edge of a block, the character is telling you: *this word is about a person*.

Write it:

1. the **short slant**, down-left, at the top
2. the **long vertical**, dropping from the middle of that slant

Top before bottom — the second of the two rules.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 人, then 𠂆 beside it. Notice you did not learn a new piece — you learned a new **posture**.
- *Notice:* 𠂆 is tall and thin because it is only using the left half of its square.

Before you move on

Why does *person* change shape at all? (To leave room in the square for whatever stands beside it.)

Source: Unicode CJK Radicals Supplement chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

2.3 尔 — a piece that is there for its sound

The narrow upright person — draw it once. Short slant, long vertical.

Script — the other kind of component

So far a component has meant something: the person piece says *this is about a person*. Here is a component that works the other way.

尔

尔 ěr. Five strokes: a short slant across the top, a broad cover beneath it, then a small stroke each side of a central vertical that finishes with a hook.

Now the part that matters, and it is the single most useful fact about Chinese writing:

Most characters are built from one component pointing at the MEANING and another pointing at the SOUND. When 尔 turns up inside a character, it is usually there because the word sounds something like ěr — not because the word has anything to do with what 尔 means on its own.

That is a strange idea when your reading habits come from an alphabet, where every piece is sound and none is meaning. It is also a relief: it means characters are not arbitrary pictures to be memorised whole. They are **built**, from a small stock of pieces, and once you know the pieces you can often guess both halves of a character you have never seen.

The pitch is **third tone**: ěr dips low.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 尔 — top slant, cover, then the middle with its hook last
- *Say it:* ěr, low and dipping

Before you move on

Two kinds of component, then. One tells you what a word is **about**; the other tells you roughly how it **sounds**. Which kind is 尔?

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

2.4 Putting two pieces together — and reading the result

Two pieces, both already yours. Draw them side by side:

亻 尔

The narrow person on the left. The five-stroke sound piece on the right.

Script — the assembly

Push them into one square block and you have written a character:

亻 + 尔 → 你

Read it the way you now know how to read it, half at a time:

- the **left** half is the person component. So this word is **about a person**.
- the **right** half is the sound piece *ěr*. So this word **sounds something like** *ěr*.

The word is *nǐ*. And that is the honest state of the sound half — *nǐ* and *ěr* are close, not identical. **A sound component gets you into the neighbourhood, not to the door.** Sound components were chosen over two thousand years of pronunciation change, and the pronunciations moved out from under them. Expect a hint, and you will be right most of the time; expect a rule, and Chinese will embarrass you weekly.

Write it left before right, exactly as you learned each half:

1. 亻 — short slant, long vertical
2. 尔 — top slant, cover, then the middle and its hook

Seven strokes in total, and you did not memorise a single new one.

What you've built

Stop and take the measure of what just happened, because it is the reason this book teaches script this way. You have not been shown a picture and asked to remember it. You were given two pieces, one at a time, and then shown that a character is what you get when they share a square. **The next character works the same way, and so does the one after that.** There are only a few hundred components in common use, and they recombine — which is what makes several thousand characters a climb rather

than a cliff.

Your turn — look, cover, rebuild

Copy 你 once while the model is visible: complete 亻, then complete 尔. Point to the meaning half and the sound half. Now cover every model, wait ten seconds, and rebuild the character from memory. Uncover and compare the two halves separately; correct only the half that stalled.

Before you move on

Two pieces, one block, and a character you can take apart again whenever you need to. Which half would you look at to guess the pronunciation?

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

2.5 女 — three strokes, seated

One character so far assembles from two known halves. Draw it, and name each half as you write it.

Script — the shape

A new piece, and like the first one it is old enough to still look like what it meant:

女

女 *nǚ* — **woman**. Three strokes.

The oracle-bone form is a **kneeling or seated figure with the arms crossed in front**. The modern character keeps the crossing: that long horizontal running right across the middle is the arms, and the two curving strokes beneath and around it are the folded body. It has straightened out over three thousand years, but nothing has been added or taken away.

Write it in this order:

1. the stroke that starts upper-right and **curves down and left**
2. the stroke that crosses it, going **down-left then flicking right**

3. the **long horizontal**, last, sweeping across both

That third stroke going last is worth noticing — a long horizontal that crosses everything else usually waits until the end.

The pitch is **third tone**, and the vowel is the rounded *ü*: say *ee* and then push your lips into a whistle without changing the tongue.

Your turn

- Write it: 女 — and let the crossing bar go last
- Say it: **nǚ**, low and dipping, lips rounded

Before you move on

Which stroke comes last, and why? (The **long horizontal** — a bar that crosses the whole character usually waits.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

2.6 子 — three strokes, a child

Three strokes, crossing bar last. Draw the seated figure you met a moment ago.

Script — the shape

子

子 *zǐ* — **child**. Three strokes again, and again a figure you can still see once you are told where to look.

This one is an infant drawn **from the front**: a large head on top, two arms out to the sides, and the legs bound together so they read as one stroke rather than two. Babies were carried swaddled, and the character kept the bundle.

Write it:

1. the short stroke across the **top**, turning down — the head
2. the **vertical with a hook**, dropping through the middle — the wrapped body

3. the **horizontal** across the middle — the arms

The pitch is **third tone**. The *z* is not the English *z* of *zoo*: it is the *ds* at the end of English *beds*, made with the tongue tip against the teeth.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 子 — head, hooked body, then arms
- *Notice:* two characters now, both three strokes, both once pictures of people. Draw them side by side and compare which parts are curved.

Before you move on

The stroke that runs down the middle carries a hook. What part of the picture is it? (The **wrapped body and legs**.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

2.7 Two pieces again — and a warning about the story

Both pieces are yours. Draw them side by side:

女 子

Script — the assembly

Squeeze them into one block, woman on the left, child on the right:

女 + 子 → 好

好 *hǎo*. Six strokes, three from each half, and again nothing new.

Note what is **different** about this assembly. The first one you built had a meaning half and a sound half. This one has **two meaning halves and no sound half at all** — neither piece sounds like *hǎo*. Both kinds of character are common, and you cannot tell which kind you are holding until you look.

When 女 is squeezed into the left of a block its long crossing bar stops short rather than sweeping past the middle, so as not to collide with what stands beside it. Same piece, narrower posture — the same accommodation you already saw the person component make.

What you've built — and a caution

You will find it said that 好 means *good* **because** a woman with a child is a good thing.

Treat that as a story, not as evidence. It is memorable, it is repeated everywhere, and there is no agreement among specialists that it is what happened — competing accounts read the woman as the sound half in an older pronunciation, or read the pair as a woman *caring for* a child. This book will hand you an etymology when there is a source behind it and tell you plainly when there is not, and this is one of the second kind.

Use the pairing as a **memory hook**, which it genuinely is. Do not file it as a fact about why the word means what it means.

Your turn — from the spoken word to the page

Copy 好 once while looking: finish 女, then 子. Notice that the crossing bar on the left stops before the right half.

Now close the page. Have a person or screen reader say *hǎo* with no character visible. Wait ten seconds, write 好 from the spoken cue, then uncover it. Compare the left half and right half separately. If one half stalled, revisit only its three-stroke lesson before trying the dictation again.

Before you move on

Six strokes, two pieces, and you built both pieces yourself. What is the one claim in this lesson you should NOT repeat as fact?

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

Chapter 3

One to Five — Where the Character Is the Count

Modes:  voice (5)  eyes (1)  pen (5)  Hands-free start: none of the 11 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count from one to five in Mandarin and read all five characters cold and out of order, and I know which of them I could have worked out and which I simply had to learn.

The five numerals read out of sequence, then off a lift panel with the fourth floor missing — and the reader knows why it is missing.

3.1 — — one stroke, and that is the character

Two chapters ago a character was a block to take apart. You learned pieces first, then the characters they build. This chapter asks nothing of the sort. Put the pieces down.

Script — the whole character

Here it is:

—

That is not a fragment. **That is the character.** One horizontal stroke, drawn left to right across the middle of the square, and nothing else.

Write it: **one héng stroke, left to right.** No pen lifts, because there is nothing to lift between. It is the shortest character you will ever write.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 一 — one stroke, left to right, straight and level

Before you move on

A character you did not have to decompose. How many times did you lift the pen? (**Not once.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

3.2 一 — one, and the number is the strokes

Draw the shape you just learned. One stroke, left to right.

The sounds and tones in this word

一 *yī* means **one**.

Read those two facts together, because their meeting is the point:

One stroke. And it means one.

Chinese will do this exactly three times, and you are about to meet all three in a row. It is the gentlest corner of a writing system with a reputation for being anything but.

Now the sound, and here is something new. Every word this book has given you so far has dipped (*nǐ, hǎo, ěr*) or risen (*rén*). This one does neither.

First tone: high and flat. Start high and stay there — not a question, not a statement, just a held note. Hum a single steady pitch and put *yī* on it. *Twice through:*

One honest note, so it does not surprise you later. 一 **does not always keep this tone.** In front of certain syllables it shifts to *yí* or *yì* — the same kind of change that turned 你好 into *nǐ hǎo*. Counting is exactly where it stays *yī*, so counting is where this book leaves it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* yī — high and flat, held
- *Read it:* 一 — say it, then say how many strokes it has

Before you move on

Which tone is $yī$ — the dipping one, or the flat one? (**Flat**, held high.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

3.3 二 — two bars, and neither is decoration

Draw the character for one. Now guess what two looks like before you read on.

Script — you were right

二

Two strokes, both horizontal, and the order is the one this book has repeated since the person radical: **top before bottom**.

But look properly, because they are **not the same length**:

- the **upper** bar is the **shorter** one
- the **lower** bar is the **longer** one

That is not decoration. A character occupies a square, and two identical bars floating in one look like an accident. The widening bottom gives the block a base to sit on. You will meet the same instinct everywhere: the last horizontal tends to be the widest, because it is the one holding everything up.

Write it: **short bar. Lift. Long bar beneath.**

Your turn

- *Write it:* 二 — short bar on top, then the long one below

Before you move on

Two strokes for two. Which goes first? (The **top**.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

3.4 二 — two, and a syllable you have met before

Draw the shape. Two bars, short over long. Count the strokes and say what number you expect it to be.

The sounds and tones in this word

二 *èr* means **two**. Two strokes, and it means two — the pattern holds. *èr* is **fourth tone**, the last of the four you had not used in a real word. Fourth tone **falls**, sharply and from a height, the way an English speaker says a short firm “No.” Drop it, do not trail it. [REPEAT x2] Now hold *èr* next to a piece you already know:

尔 *ěr* — the sound-component inside 你

二 *èr* — the number two

Same syllable. Different tone. Completely unrelated characters. One dips; one falls. Nothing else separates them. You met this idea once already, when 好 *hǎo* “good” turned into 好 *hào* “fond of” on a change of pitch alone. That was one character with two readings; this is two characters colliding in sound. Both are the same lesson: **in Mandarin the pitch is not decoration on the word. It is part of the word.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *èr* — falling, dropped firmly
- *ěr*, then *èr* — dip, then fall. Feel the difference in your throat.
- *yī*, *èr* — flat, then down

Before you move on

What separates *ěr* from *èr*? (**Only the tone** — and they are different characters entirely.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

3.5 三 — three bars, and the pattern's last stand

One bar. Two bars. Say what comes next out loud before you look.

Script — the pattern holds one last time

三

Three strokes. Top, then middle, then bottom — the same rule, a third time.

The lengths are not a simple ladder:

- the **top** bar is medium
- the **middle** bar is the **shortest** of the three
- the **bottom** bar is by far the **longest**

Pinching the middle and widening the base keeps 三 from reading as three identical lines you would have to stop and count. Your eye takes it in whole. That is the difference between a **character** and a **tally** — and the reason the next one cannot be four bars.

Write it: **top, lift, middle, lift, bottom.** Two pen lifts.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 三 — top, middle short, bottom long
- *Read it:* 一 二 三 — point at each and count its strokes

Before you move on

Imagine four bars stacked in a square. Could you read it, or would you have to **count** it? (Count it — which is why the next character is not four bars.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

3.6 三 — three, and the end of the easy road

Draw the three bars. Middle short, bottom long.

The sounds and tones in this word

≡ *sān* means **three**. Three strokes, three — for the third and last time.

sān is **first tone**, the flat high one you met on *yī*. Hold it level. The *a* is open, the *n* light at the end. [REPEAT x2]

So of your first three numbers, two sit flat and one falls:

yī flat, **èr** falling, **sān** flat

Say the run. It goes *level, down, level*, and that shape is the first thing a listener recognises — before any of the individual words.

Why it's said this way

Three characters in, one stroke per unit, a system so regular it barely needs teaching. **It stops here**, and you should know why before it happens.

Every counting system humans have built hits the same wall in the same place. Roman numerals go I, II, III and then break to IV, because stacked marks stop being readable at about three. This one breaks for exactly the same reason.

You are being told now so that the next character feels like a solved problem rather than a broken promise.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **yī**, **èr**, **sān** — level, down, level
- *Read it:* — 一 二 三 — say each as you point at it

Before you move on

Three characters, three stroke counts, nothing memorised. That ends now.

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

3.7 四 — a box, and the rule that governs every box

Draw one, two and three. You were told this is where it stops.

Script — five strokes, for four

四

Five strokes, for the number four. The trick is gone, exactly as promised.

四 is a **box with two things inside it**, and every box obeys one rule: **close the bottom LAST**. Walls, then contents, then shut the door.

In order:

1. the **left vertical**, top to bottom
2. the **top and right side in one turning stroke** — across, then down without lifting the pen at the corner
3. the short **inner left-falling** stroke
4. the **inner stroke that turns up** at its foot
5. the **bottom bar**, closing the box — **last**

Two strokes of wall, two of filling, one to shut the door. Four pen lifts.

Notice that the corner in step 2 is **one stroke, not two**. A horizontal that turns and runs downward without the pen leaving the paper is a single unit — *héngzhé*, “horizontal-turn”. Miscounting it is the commonest way a beginner’s stroke count goes wrong.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 四 — walls, then the two inner strokes, then the bottom last

Before you move on

Is the turning corner one stroke or two? (**One** — *héngzhé*.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

3.8 四 — four, borrowed for its sound

Draw the box. Walls, contents, bottom last. Count the strokes: five, for the number four.

The sounds and tones in this word

四 *sì* means **four**, and the shape has nothing to do with fourness. 四 is not a picture of four things. It is a shape that already meant something else, **borrowed for its sound** — the same move you met in 尔, a piece carried for how it sounds rather than what it means. The borrowing won outright: nobody reads 四 as anything but four now. **sì** is **fourth tone**, falling, like *èr*. The vowel is not the *ee* of “see”: after *s*, pinyin *i* is a tight buzz in the same position as the *s* itself. Say *sss*, then voice it without moving your tongue. [REPEAT x2]

Why it’s said this way

A reason to get that tone right, and it is a real one:

sì (falling) — four

sǐ (dipping) — die

Separated **by pitch alone** — the third time this chapter has shown you that tone is part of a Mandarin word’s identity, not an accent on it. Not a curiosity, either: it is why many buildings in China number floors 1, 2, 3, 5, skipping four the way some Western buildings skip thirteen.

Your turn

- *Say it:* sì — falling, firm
- *Read it:* 一 二 三 四 — in order, then out of order

Before you move on

Four is the first number here you could not work out. What replaced the trick? (**A shape borrowed for its sound**, built to a rule.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

3.9 五 — count the strokes and be wrong

Guess, out loud, how many strokes the character for five will have.

Script — four, for five

五

Four strokes. For five.

If you guessed five, good — that guess is the point. The trick that carried you through the first three is not merely retired, it now actively misleads.

The four strokes, in order:

1. the **top horizontal**, left to right
2. the **descending stroke**, from the top bar down, leaning slightly left
3. the **turning stroke** — across to the right, then down
4. the **bottom horizontal**, the widest in the character, closing it

You already know why the last is widest: it is the base, the same instinct as the long bottom bar of 二 and 三. Three pen lifts.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 五 — top bar, descender, turn, then the wide base
- *Read it:* 一 二 三 四 五 — name each shape without saying the numbers yet

Before you move on

Which stroke is widest, and why? (The **bottom** — it is the base.)
Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

3.10 五 — five, and the run is complete

Draw the shape. Four strokes — for five.

The sounds and tones in this word

五 *wǔ* means **five**.

wǔ is **third tone**, the low dipping one you have had since *nǐ*. Keep it low and let it creak; do not push it back up. [REPEAT x2]

You already own two words on this tone:

你 *nǐ*, 好 *hǎo*, 五 *wǔ*

All three dip. Say them in a row: the pitch should not change shape once, only the mouth around it.

One spelling note while you are here. In *wǔ* there is no consonant hiding under that **w**: the *w* **is** the *u*, written that way because pinyin does not begin a syllable with a bare *u*. Round your lips and voice it.

What you've built — one to five

You can now count:

一 二 三 四 五

yī, èr, sān, sì, wǔ

Say it as one run, not five separate words. The tone shape is **level, down, level, down, dip**, and that rhythm is what a listener hears first.

Five characters, and three ways one can come to you: two you derived, one was borrowed for its sound, and two you simply learned. That mix is Chinese writing in miniature, and you have now met all of it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **nǐ, hǎo, wǔ** — three dips, one shape
- **yī èr sān sì wǔ** — one run, at speed

Before you move on

Which tone do *nǐ*, *hǎo* and *wǔ* share? (The **third** — low and dipping.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

3.11 Practice — read the numbers off a wall

Count to five aloud, in order, without looking. Then do it again with your eyes on the characters:

一 二 三 四 五

Script — the same five, shuffled

Counting in order is slightly dishonest: the sequence carries you, and you can recite *yī èr sān* without reading anything.

So here they are shuffled. Name each before moving on, without letting your eye run back to the row above:

四 一 五 二 三

三 五 一 四 二

If one of them made you pause, it will be 四 or 五 — the two you could not derive. That is expected, and it tells you exactly which two to drill.

Why it's said this way

Not a party trick. A lift panel, a floor directory, a bus number, a market price — all use these characters **on their own**, with no sentence around them. That is why five are already useful; you are not waiting on grammar:

You see: 三

You say: *sān* — third floor.

And when the panel reads

一 二 三 五

with no 四 between three and five, you know why, and you are not confused by it.

The exchange

Two voices, using only what this book has given you:

A: 你好 — *ní hǎo* (the sandhi tone, as always)

B: 你好 — *ní hǎo*

A: [pointing at a panel] 五 — *wǔ*

B: 五 — *wǔ*

Small, and entirely real: repeating a floor number back is what people do in a lift, in any language.

Your turn

- *Read it:* 四 — 五 二 三 — cover the row above first
- *Say it:* yī èr sān sì wǔ — one run, level, down, level, down, dip
- *Write it:* 五 — top bar, descender, turn, wide base

What you've built this chapter

Five characters, and three different ways a character can come to you:

- 一 二 三 — transparent. The strokes *are* the number.
- 四 — borrowed for its sound, and built on a box whose rule you can reuse.
- 五 — plain. Four strokes for five, learned as a shape.

That spread is not an accident of this chapter. It is the whole writing system in small: a little of it can be reasoned out, more of it is borrowed sound, and the rest is simply known. You have now met all three, on characters short enough that none of them hurt.

Before you move on

You can read the five characters cold, in any order, with no sentence around them. A panel reads 一 二 三 五 — which number is missing, and why? (四, because *sì* sits one tone from *sǐ*.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 4

One Box, Two Characters, and the First Thing You Can Refuse

Modes:  voice (3)  eyes (1)  pen (3)  Hands-free start: none of the 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write 口 and 日 – the second being the first with one bar added – and I can disagree in Mandarin by putting 不 in front of a word I already know, because Mandarin has no standalone word for no.

The first exchange in the book that contains a disagreement – a greeting, a question, and a refusal built by negating a word the reader has had since the opening lesson.

4.1 口 — the box, on its own

Write 四. Walls, then the two inner strokes, then the bottom last.

Script — the shape

口

Your hand can already write this. Three strokes, in exactly the order you learned inside 四, and the rule from there is the whole instruction:

1. the **left vertical**, top to bottom

2. the **top and right side in one turning stroke** — the *héngzhé*, across then down without lifting
3. the **bottom bar**, closing it — **last**

Three strokes, two pen lifts. Walls, then the door.

One honest note, because it will save you trouble later. The enclosing frame around 回 and this character are **not the same piece**, even though they are written identically. Chinese has a separate enclosure component that does the surrounding, and 口 is a character in its own right. What transfers here is the hand movement, not the identity — and the hand movement is most of the work.

Your turn

Write these out:

- 口 — left wall, turning stroke, bottom last
- 回, then 口 — the same movement, two different pieces

Before you move on

How many strokes? (**Three** — the turning corner counts as one.)
Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

4.2 口 — mouth, and a piece you will meet everywhere

Draw the box. Three strokes, bottom last.

The sounds and tones in this word

口 *kǒu* means **mouth**.

Look at it again now that it means something. **It is an open mouth, seen from the front** — squared off, the way every Chinese character is squared off to fit its block, but a picture all the same. The oldest forms are rounder and even more obviously a mouth.

kǒu is **third tone**, the low dipping one you have had since *nǐ*. Keep it low. [REPEAT x2]

Why it's said this way

You have already met pieces that live inside other characters — 女 and 子 sit inside 好. 口 is the commonest of them all. When you see it as a **small element in a corner** of a bigger character, it very often says the word has something to do with the **mouth**: speaking, eating, calling, tasting.

The size matters. A full-height frame around a whole character is a different piece doing a different job; the mouth hint is for the small one tucked into a corner.

That is worth more than the word itself. You are not going to memorise five thousand characters as pictures; you are going to learn a few hundred pieces and read the rest as combinations. 口 is one of the commonest pieces there is.

Your turn

- *Say it:* kǒu — low and dipping
- *Write it:* 口 — and say what it is a picture of

Before you move on

If you meet this box inside a bigger character, what does it usually hint at? (Something to do with the **mouth**.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

4.3 日 — one bar inside the box

Draw the box. Now hold it in your head; you are about to fill it.

Script — the shape

日

The same box, with one horizontal bar across the middle. That is the entire difference, and it buys you a second character.

Four strokes, and the order has one thing worth getting right:

1. the **left vertical**

2. the **top and right side**, one turning stroke
3. the **middle bar**
4. the **bottom bar**, closing it — still last

The middle bar goes in before the bottom. Fill the box, then shut it. That is the same instinct as the box rule itself, applied one level in: you never close a space you still have to write inside.

Three pen lifts. If your box was comfortable, this cost you one line.

Your turn

Write these out:

- □, then 日 — the same four movements plus one
- 日 — and check that the middle bar went in before the bottom

Before you move on

How many strokes separate this character from the box? (**One.**)
 Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

4.4 日 — the sun, and the day it measures

Write the box, then the box with a bar. Two characters, one shape.

The sounds and tones in this word

日 *rì* means **sun** — and also **day**.

The picture is the sun: a disc with a mark in the middle. Squared off, like everything else, but that is what the bar is doing there. The oldest forms are a circle with a dot.

rì is **fourth tone**, falling. The *r* is not an English *r* and not a Spanish one either: start where your tongue sits for the *s* in English *measure*, then **curl the tip back** a little. Let the vowel be short and tight.

Twice through:

Why it's said this way

Sun and **day** in the same word is not a Chinese quirk. It is what happens in language after language, because the sun is how a day was counted before anybody had a clock. English does the same thing from the other end: we say *the sun rose* and *three days later*, and nobody finds it strange that a *day* is both the light and the span.

So this is one of the rare characters where you get two meanings and have to learn neither: they are the same idea, and the context tells you which.

Like 日, this one turns up **inside** other characters, and when it does it is almost always about the sun, light, or time.

Your turn

- *Say it:* 日 — falling, and the *r* of *measure*
- *Write it:* 日 — and say both of its meanings

Before you move on

If you meet this shape inside a bigger character, what is it hinting at? (**Sun, light or time.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

4.5 丂 — four strokes, all of them separate

Write 日. Middle bar before the bottom.

Script — the shape

丂

Four strokes, in this order:

1. a **top horizontal**, left to right
2. lift, then a **long stroke from the upper centre down to the left**
3. lift, then the **central vertical**, straight down
4. lift, then a **short right-falling dot**

Three pen lifts, and every stroke stands alone. Nothing joins here. That is unusual enough to be worth saying plainly: the boxes you have just written were one continuous movement in places, and this is the opposite — four deliberate, separate marks under a single roof.

The commonest beginner’s version runs the second and third strokes together into a corner. They are not a corner. Lift.

Your turn

Write these out:

- 不 — top bar, the long left-falling stroke, the vertical, the dot
- it again, counting the lifts aloud. There should be three.

Before you move on

Do the second and third strokes meet in a corner? (**No** — lift between them.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

4.6 不 — how Mandarin says no

Write 不, counting three lifts. Then say **hǎo** — good.

The sounds and tones in this word

不 *bù* means **not**.

bù is **fourth tone**, falling — the same firm drop you learned on *èr* and *sì*. [REPEAT x2]

Grammar Lens: there is no word for “no”

Here is something that surprises nearly every learner, and it is better met now than discovered later.

Mandarin has no single word meaning “no.”

English has one. So does French, Spanish, Russian. Mandarin does not. What it has instead is 不, which goes in front of a word and turns it around:

好 *hǎo* — good

不好 *bù hǎo* — not good

So when someone asks you a yes-or-no question in Mandarin, you do not answer with a word for “no”. **You answer by negating the thing they asked about.** Ask whether something is 好, and “no” comes back as 不好.

This sounds like extra work and is actually less: you already know 好, so you already know how to refuse it, and the same holds for every word you have so far.

One word will break the pattern later — Mandarin has a second negator for *having*, and you will meet it with the word it belongs to. Everything in this book up to now takes 不.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **bù** — falling, firm
- *Say it:* **hǎo**, then **bù hǎo** — good, then not good
- *Write it:* 不好

Before you move on

You have known 好 since the first lesson. How much did its opposite cost you? (**One character.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

4.7 Practice — one box, two characters, and a refusal

Write 口. Then write 日. One line apart.

The exchange

Two voices, using only what you have:

A: 你好

ní hǎo

B: 你好

ní hǎo

A: 好

hǎo — good?

B: 不好

bù hǎo — not good.

Small, and it is the first time in this book you have been able to **disagree**. Up to now every exchange has been agreement: a greeting answered by the same greeting, a number read back. This one has a no in it.

What you've built this chapter

Three characters, and not one of them cost what it looks like it cost:

- 口 *kǒu*, mouth — you already knew the shape; it is the box from the number four, standing on its own
- 日 *rì*, sun and day — the same box with one bar added
- 不 *bù*, not — four separate strokes, and it turns every word you own into its opposite

That last one is the largest thing in the chapter. 不 **does not add one word to your vocabulary; it doubles what you already have**. Everything you have learned to say so far, you have now learned to refuse.

And the two boxes are a down payment of a different kind. 口 and 日 both turn up **inside** other characters — mouth for speaking and eating, sun for light and time — so the next character that contains one will already be half read.

Your turn

- *Read it:* 口 日 不 — name each one, then say what it means
- *Write it:* 日 — and check the middle bar went in before the bottom
- *Say it:* 好, then 不好

Before you move on

Which two of this chapter's characters share a shape? (□ and 𠃍.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 5

Yes, No, and a Tone That Moves

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write 是 by finishing 日 before the body underneath, answer a yes-or-no question either way by keeping or negating the word I was asked about, and apply the rule that 不 rises before a falling tone even though the writing never shows it.

The first exchange in which the reader can answer either way – 是 for yes, 不是 for no – and hear the negator's pitch rise on a page that records no such thing.

5.1 是 — finish the sun, then build under it

Write 日. Four strokes, middle bar before the bottom.

Script — the shape

是

Nine strokes. That is more than double anything you have written, and it is the point at which counting strokes stops being useful and structure takes over.

Here is the structure, and it makes the character easy: 是 is 日 **sitting on top of a body.** You have written the top already.

1-4. 日, **complete.** Left vertical; top and right in one turning stroke; the middle bar; the bottom bar closing it. Exactly as you learned it.

Then, underneath:

1. a **wide horizontal**, wider than the 日 above it
2. a **central vertical** coming down
3. a **short horizontal** at the lower right
4. a **falling stroke** to the lower left
5. a **long finishing stroke** down to the right

Finish 日 before you begin the body. This is the same instinct as the box rule and the middle bar: complete an enclosed unit before moving on. Chinese stroke order is a small number of habits applied over and over, and you now have three of them.

Eight pen lifts. Take it slowly; nobody writes this quickly at first.

Your turn

Write these out:

- 日 on its own, then 是 — and notice the first four strokes are identical
- 是 again, saying “sun first” before you start

Before you move on

How many of the nine strokes did you already know? (**Four.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

5.2 是 — “is”, and the nearest thing to “yes”

Write 是. Sun first, then the body.

The sounds and tones in this word

是 *shì* means **is** — am, is, are, all one word with no changes for person or number.

shì is **fourth tone**, falling. The initial is the same retroflex position you met on *rì*: tongue tip curled back, and this time unvoiced — closer to the *sh* of English *shirt* than to *s*. [REPEAT x2]

Grammar Lens: yes by echo

You already know that Mandarin has no single word for **no** — you negate the word you were asked about. The other half of that rule is now available to you:

Mandarin has no single word for “yes” either. You echo the word back.

Asked whether something 是, you answer 是. That is the yes. It is not a separate word meaning agreement; it is the word you were asked about, returned.

It is not the *only* way Mandarin says yes — spoken Mandarin has other affirmatives you will meet in time. It is the one that follows from what you already know, and the one that works whenever the question hands you a word to give back.

Neither half of the pair is the word an English speaker goes looking for. This is worth holding onto, because it is the shape of a great many Mandarin answers: **the reply is the question’s own word, kept or turned**. You have the keeping half now; the turning half is the next lesson, and you already own the character it needs.

Your turn

- Say it: **shì** — falling, tongue curled back
- Say it: **shì** as an answer meaning “yes”
- Write it: 是

Before you move on

What is the yes, asked about 是? (是 — the same word, returned.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

5.3 不是 — “is not”, and the second tone that moves

Say **shì**. Then say **bù**. Both fall.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

不是

Nothing new on the page: 不 in front of 是, exactly the rule you already have. It means **is not**.

But say the two words you just warmed up with, one after the other, and something is wrong. **bù** falls. **shì** falls. Two sharp drops in a row, back to back, and your mouth does not want to make them.

Why it's said this way

Mandarin does not make you do it. 不 **changes its own tone rather than collide**.

written: 不是 — *bù + shì*

spoken: **bú shì** — *bú* rises

不 **becomes second tone, rising, whenever a fourth tone follows it**. Before anything else it stays *bù*, falling — which is why 不好 was *bù hǎo*, unchanged, with 好 in the third tone.

You have met this exact machinery once before. When two third tones met in 你好, the first one moved and became rising, so *nǐ hǎo* came out as *ní hǎo*. Same problem, same kind of solution: **when two tones would clash, the first one gives way, and the spelling never records it**.

That is the **second** rule of this kind you have been taught in full, and both share one warning: **the page will not tell you**. You were also warned about a third, on 一, which shifts its own tone in front of certain syllables — that one is still waiting, and it will arrive with the words that need it. 不是 is written with the falling-tone 不 every time. The change lives in the mouth, and you have to carry it yourself.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **bù**, then **shì**, deliberately clashing. Hear why it is awkward.
- **bú shì** — the first one rising now

- **bù hǎo**, then **bú shì** — falling, then rising, and say why

Before you move on

Does the writing change when the tone does? (**No** — 不是 is written the same way every time.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

5.4 Practice — answering either way

Write 是. Sun first, then the body underneath.

The exchange

Two voices, and for the first time the second one has a real choice:

A: 你好

nǐ hǎo

B: 你好

nǐ hǎo

A: 是

shì — is it?

B: 是

shì — yes.

And the same exchange, refused:

A: 是

shì

B: 不是

bú shì — no.

Say the last line twice and listen to the first syllable. It **rises**. Write it and it falls. That gap between the page and the mouth is the whole lesson.

What you've built this chapter

One character, and with it both answers.

是 is nine strokes, the longest thing you have written — but four of them were 日, finished before the body began, and that is why it was manageable. The habit of completing an enclosed piece before moving on has now carried you through a box, a box with a bar, and a nine-stroke character built on top of one.

And the pair is closed. Mandarin gives you neither a word for yes nor a word for no; it gives you one word and two things to do with it. 是 keeps it. 不是 turns it. Every yes-or-no answer you learn from here will work the same way.

The tone rule is the part to carry away, because nothing on the page will remind you: 不 **ris**es **before a falling tone**. That is the second such rule taught in full, after the one on 你好, and a third — on 一 — has been flagged and not yet taught. Every one of them is invisible in the writing.

Your turn

- *Say it:* shì, then bú shì — yes, then no
- *Say it:* bù hǎo, then bú shì — and say which one moved, and why
- *Write it:* 是, then 不是

Before you move on

Do either of the rules you have been taught show up in the writing? (**Neither.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 6

See You Again

Modes: ⇄ voice (2) ✍ pen (2) ⇄ **Hands-free start:** none of the 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write 再 and 见, say goodbye with 再见, read the word literally as “see again” because its two pieces genuinely add up, and name which expressions I know are spoken differently from how they are written.

The first exchange in the track that opens, turns and closes – greeting, an answer either way, and a parting – with every line built from characters the reader has written rather than a phrase memorised whole.

6.1 再 — a bar, a frame, and a line that closes it

Write 是. Nine strokes, and the sun on top finished first.

Script — the shape

再

Six strokes. Fewer than the last one, and the structure is easier to see: a horizontal bar across the top, a frame hanging underneath it, and a long horizontal closing the whole thing at the bottom.

1. the **top horizontal**, left to right
2. the **left side**, coming straight down

3. the **frame**: start again at the upper left, cross to the right, **turn down** the right side, and **hook left** at the base — all without lifting
4. the **central vertical**, down through the middle
5. the **inner horizontal**, left to right
6. the **long bottom horizontal**, left to right, wider than everything above it

Five pen lifts.

Stroke 3 is the one to watch. It is a **single stroke that changes direction twice** — across, down, then a hook to the left. You have met most of it before: the outer wall of a box is always one turning stroke, never two or three. Compare it with the frame you drew in 日 — the same across-and-down turn, with a hook added at the end.

And the closing bar is last. **The box is not sealed until the end** — the same rule that made you draw the middle bar of 日 before its bottom bar. Chinese stroke order keeps re-using a small set of habits, and this is one you now know well enough to expect.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 再 — bar, left side, then the turning frame in one movement
- *Write it:* 再 again, and count the lifts. There are five.
- *Say it:* **zài** — falling, from high to low

Before you move on

Which stroke of 再 is drawn last? (**The long bottom bar.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

6.2 见 — an eye on two legs

Write 人. Two strokes, left before right, a figure on two legs.

Script — the shape

见

Four strokes, and after the last two characters that will feel like a rest. It is built in two parts, top and bottom:

- on top, a **frame** — a narrow box, which the traditional reading takes to be an **eye**
- underneath, **two legs**, written 儿 — which is what 人 becomes when it has to stand underneath something

The legs have changed a little in this position. The left one still falls away to the lower left exactly as it did. The right one no longer just presses down: it descends, **bends right along the base, and finishes with a hook upward**. That is what a leg does when it has to carry a frame above it.

The order:

1. the frame's **left side**, coming down
2. the frame's **top**, turning down the **right side** — one stroke, no lift, and this one is exactly the turn you drew in 目, hook and all absent
3. the **left leg**, falling to the lower left
4. the **right leg**: down, bend right, hook up — one stroke, no lift

Three pen lifts. Two of the four strokes turn, and neither of them is allowed to be broken into pieces.

A frame over a person, and the word means “to see.” That is a memory hook, not a proof — but it is the kind of hook this book has been giving you in place of a shared ancestor with English, and this one is unusually easy to hold.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 人, then 见 — and find the legs in the second one
- *Write it:* 见, stopping after stroke 2 to check the frame is closed on three sides
- *Say it:* **jiàn** — falling

Before you move on

How does the last stroke finish? (**With a hook, upward.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

6.3 再见 — the word that says what it means

Write 再, then 见. Six strokes, then four.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

再见

再见 *zàijiàn* — **goodbye**. Two characters, one word, and you can already write both of them.

Now the meanings, which have been held back until you had the shapes:

- 再 *zài* means **again**
- 见 *jiàn* means **see**

So the word is “**see again.**” That is not a hook, not a mnemonic, not a traditional gloss offered with a warning attached. It is what the two characters say, and it is what the word means.

Every earlier component gave you a *hook* — 亅 at the left of 你, 女 beside 子 in 好 — labelled a memory aid rather than history. **Here the parts add up.** Chinese does this often. Start expecting it.

The sounds and tones in this word

Both syllables are **fourth tone**. Both fall.

Say it slowly: *zài* falls, then *jiàn* falls. Two separate drops. The common mistake is to run them into one long slide. Reset your pitch upward between them. [REPEAT x2]

And no *rule* moves. Neither of the two tone rules you have been taught applies to two fourth tones, so 再见 is said with the tones it is written with. A native speaker does clip that first fall a little short — but that is a shading of the same tone, not a different one, and

neither the characters nor the pinyin change. Which is the point: the shadings live in the mouth.

Why it's said this way

If you know any German: *auf Wiedersehen* is “on seeing again” — the same two pieces, in the same order. A coincidence of thinking, not of ancestry; **Chinese and German share no common ancestor**. But parting by promising to meet again is an idea many languages reach for on their own, and that makes 再见 far easier to hold than a shape memorised cold.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **zàijiàn** — two falls, resetting the pitch between them
- *Read it:* 再见 — give its literal reading before its translation

Before you move on

Does either tone move in 再见? (**No — both fall, and nothing changes.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

6.4 Practice — a conversation that ends

Say **zàijiàn**. Two falls, with the pitch reset between them.

The exchange

Everything below is a character you have written yourself. Read it straight through:

A: 你好

ní hǎo — hello.

B: 你好

ní hǎo — hello.

A: 是

shì — is it?

B: 不是

bú shì — no.

A: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

B: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

That is a conversation with a beginning, a middle and an end. It is short, and it is real: two people meet, one asks something, the other declines it, and both leave properly. **Nothing in it is a phrase you memorised whole.** You built every line from characters and rules.

What you've built — and what stays invisible

Read the exchange out loud once more, and count the places where your mouth does something the page does not record:

- 你好 is written with two low dipping tones and spoken *ní hǎo* — the first one rises.
- 不是 is written with a falling 不 and spoken *bú shì* — the 不 rises.
- 再见 is written with two falls and spoken with two falls. No rule moves.

Two out of three. That ratio is not a fluke, and it is the single most useful thing to know about reading Mandarin aloud: **the writing records the words, not the way the words meet each other.** From here on, whenever two pieces sit side by side, ask what happens between them.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the whole exchange, both parts, without stopping

- *Say it:* it again, taking B's side, and answer 是 instead of 不是
- *Write it:* 再见 — six strokes, then four

Before you move on

In this exchange, how many of the three expressions are spoken exactly as written? (**One** — 再见.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 7

Good Morning, and a Rule That Declines to Fire

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ✎ pen (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write 早 and 上, greet someone with 早上好, hear a neutral-tone syllable as the absence of a tone mark rather than a mistake, and say why the third-tone rule changes 你好 but leaves 早上好 alone.

The first exchange where the reader chooses between two correct greetings rather than reciting the only one available – and the first place all three tone behaviours in the track line up side by side, one moving and two declining to.

7.1 早 — sun on top, one more time

Write 日. Four strokes. Middle bar before the bottom bar.

Script — the shape

早

Six strokes, and you can already guess how it starts.

早 is 日 on top of 十. You have written the sun before. The piece underneath is 十, which on its own is the character for **ten** — you have not been taught it and you do not need it today. Treat it as two strokes: one across, one down through it.

1-4. 日, **complete**. Left side; top and right in one turning stroke; the middle bar; the bottom bar closing it.

1. 十's **horizontal**, left to right
2. 十's **vertical**, coming down *through* that horizontal

Five pen lifts.

Predict the rule before you read it: does 日 get finished first?

It does — the same habit that made 是 manageable, and by now it should be doing the work for you rather than the instruction.

A word about what 早 means, offered as a memory hook and labelled as one: the sun sitting above a short line is easy to read as **the sun just up over the horizon**, and 早 means **early**. That is a picture worth keeping. It is not a proof, and the honest position is that the lower piece's history is disputed.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 日, then 早 — and stop after four strokes to check the sun is closed
- *Say it:* **zǎo** — low and dipping

Before you move on

Which way does the last stroke go? (**Down, through the horizontal.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

7.2 上 — the same rule, read the other way

Write 早. Sun first, then the two strokes below.

Script — the shape

上

Three strokes. A vertical, a short horizontal to its right, and a long horizontal underneath.

Now guess the order, and expect to be wrong:

1. the **central vertical**, from the top down

2. the **short horizontal**, left to right, starting at the vertical
3. the **long base horizontal**, left to right

Two pen lifts.

The vertical comes first, and you wrote the opposite one lesson ago. Inside 早, the two strokes of 十 went **horizontal first, then the vertical down through it**. Here the order is reversed.

The difference is what the two strokes do to each other. In 十 they **cross**, and the horizontal leads. In 上 the short bar **starts at** the vertical instead of crossing it — so there is nothing to cross, and the vertical goes first.

That is worth meeting on a three-stroke character, because it tells you something true about the system: these are **strong tendencies with conditions**, not laws. Learn the condition and you can predict the order instead of memorising it.

The other thing to notice: **short horizontal before long horizontal**. The base bar is the widest stroke and it goes last, exactly as the closing bar did in 再. When two horizontals differ in length, the long one is usually the finisher.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 上 — vertical first, even though your hand will want the short bar
- *Write it:* 上 again, and say “short, then long” as you draw the two bars
- *Say it:* **shàng** — falling

Before you move on

Which of the two horizontals is drawn last? (**The long one.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

7.3 早上 — morning, and a syllable that goes light

Say **zǎo**. Low and dipping, and hold the bottom of it.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

早上

早上 *zǎoshang* — **morning**.

The parts add up again, though less tidily than 再见 did. 早 is *early*; 上 on its own means *up* or *on top*. Early-up, the early part of the day. Take that as a hook rather than a definition: what you need is that the two characters you just wrote make the word for morning.

The sounds and tones in this word

The pinyin for this word is *zǎoshang* — and 上 **has lost its tone mark**.

On its own 上 is *shàng*, fourth tone, falling — you practised it that way. Inside this word it goes **neutral**: short, light, and pitched by whatever came before it. Neutral syllables are written with **no mark at all**, and that absence is the information.

This is a fifth thing a syllable can do, alongside the four tones. It is not a tone that moves — you have met two of those — it is a syllable **giving up its tone** because it is unstressed. [REPEAT x2]

Careful or slow speech sometimes restores the full falling tone, *zǎoshàng*, and you will hear it. The standard reading, and the one to imitate, is the light one.

Say it: *zǎo* low and dipping, then *shang* light and quick, riding on the end. The commonest mistake is to give the second syllable a full falling tone out of habit, which makes the word sound like two words.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **shàng** alone, falling — then **zǎoshang**, with the second syllable light
- **zǎoshang** twice more, and say aloud which syllable carries no tone

Before you move on

Does 上 keep its falling tone when it stands alone? (**Yes** — the light reading belongs to the word, not to the character.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

7.4 早上好 — the greeting was a pattern all along

Say **zǎoshang**. Second syllable light.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

早上好

早上好 *zǎoshang hǎo* — **good morning**.

It ends in 好 — the same character, the same word, that you met in the first greeting in this book.

That is the payoff, and it is worth being explicit about. 你好 was never a phrase to swallow whole. It is 你 *you* followed by 好 *good*, and the second half is reusable:

你 + 好 → 你好, and 早上 + 好 → 早上好

Put a person or a time in front of 好 and you have a greeting.

You have not learned two greetings; you have learned a **frame** and filled it twice. Every one of the other times of day works the same way, and you will be able to build those greetings the moment you have the words for those times.

The sounds and tones in this word

You know a rule about two third tones meeting: the first one rises, which is why 你好 is said *ní hǎo*.

早 is third tone. 好 is third tone. So does 早上好 become *záoshang hǎo*?

No — and the reason is the whole point of a rule having conditions. The rule needs the two third tones to be **next to each other**. Here they are not: 上 sits between them. A light, toneless syllable is still a syllable, and it keeps the two dipping tones apart. So *zǎoshang hǎo*: 早 low, 上 light, 好 low and dipping. Nothing rises.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *nǐ hǎo*, then *zǎoshang hǎo* — and say which one moved
- *zǎoshang*, then *zǎoshang hǎo* — the greeting is the word plus 好

Before you move on

Why does the third-tone rule not fire in this greeting? (**The two third tones are not next to each other.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

7.5 Practice — greeting the time of day

Say *zǎoshang hǎo*. Low, light, low.

The exchange

A: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

B: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

A: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

B: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

Short, and for the first time you had a **choice** to make. 你好 would also have been correct. 早上好 is the one that fits the hour, and choosing between them is a thing a speaker does, not a thing a phrasebook does for you.

What you've built — three tones, three behaviours

Line the greetings up and every tone behaviour you have been taught is visible at once:

- 你好 — two third tones, side by side. The first **rises**: *ní hǎo*.
- 早上好 — two third tones, held apart by a light syllable. **Neither moves**.

- 再见 — two falling tones. **Neither moves.**

That middle line is the one that repays study. It is the same rule as the first line, and it does not fire, because the condition it needs is not met. **A rule you can only apply is half a rule; a rule you can also decline to apply is a whole one.**

And none of it shows on the page. Every character in all three is written exactly as it would be alone.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **nǐ hǎo**, then **zǎoshang hǎo** — and say which one moved
- *Say it:* the whole exchange, both parts
- *Write it:* 早上好, then 再见

Before you move on

Which of the three expressions above has a tone that moves? (**Only** 你好.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 8

Saying Who You Are

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) ✍️ pen (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: none of the 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write 我, 名 and 字, introduce myself with 我是 and my own name, recognise 名字 as the word for a name, and I know that Mandarin never changes a word to show what job it is doing in a sentence.

The first exchange the reader cannot finish without supplying something of their own – their name – and the first place the book names a gap it is choosing not to fill, rather than teaching a sentence no speaker would say.

8.1 我 — seven strokes, and an honest admission

Write 是. Nine strokes, sun finished on top.

Script — the shape

我

Seven strokes, and here this book owes you a straight answer.

Every character so far has had **at least one piece you already owned**: 你 is 亻 beside 尔, 是 sits on 日, 早 sits on 日. 我 has none. Its right side is a shape called 戈 — there it is, but naming it is all this lesson will do with it, because you have not been taught to write it. Its left side is a squeezed hand. Neither is a piece you own.

So learn it as a **route**, not as a sum. Follow the order and it holds together:

1. a short **falling stroke** at the upper left
2. the **upper horizontal**, left to right
3. the **vertical**, coming down and **hooking left** without lifting
4. the **lower rising stroke**
5. the **long curved slash** down to the right, **hooking upward** at its end
6. a separate **rising slash** up to the left
7. a **dot** at the upper right, pressed down-right

Six pen lifts.

Two of these are joined strokes that must not be broken: **stroke 3** (down, then hook) and **stroke 5** (the long slash, then hook up). Everything you have learned about turning strokes applies here — the pen changes direction, the stroke does not end.

The dot goes **last**. Small marks at the upper right are finishers, and you will see that again.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 我 slowly, twice — and keep strokes 3 and 5 unbroken
- *Write it:* 我 once more, saving the dot for last
- *Say it:* wǒ — low and dipping

Before you move on

Is this character built from pieces you already know? (**No** — and this book would rather say so than invent a story.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

8.2 我 — I, me, and saying who you are

Say wǒ. Low and dipping, and hold the bottom of it.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

我 *wǒ* — I. And also me.

English uses two words there and swaps between them depending on the job: *I saw her, she saw me*. **Mandarin uses 我 for both**, and this is your first sight of something that will save you a great deal of work: **Mandarin never changes a word to show what job it is doing in a sentence**. No I/me swap, no case endings, no agreeing with a subject. 我是 我 in either seat.

Mandarin does bolt small extra pieces onto words for *other* jobs, and you will meet them — but never to mark who is doing what to whom. Now put it to work with a word you already have:

我是 *wǒ shì* — I am

是 is the word you learned for answering yes. Its actual job is to link two things: 我是 and then who you are. Say your own name after it and you have introduced yourself.

There is a second way to say this, built on a word you do not have yet. 我是 is **not a stand-in for it** — both are real, and this is the one you can write today.

Two third tones meet in *wǒ shì*? No — 是 is **fourth** tone. Nothing moves.

Your turn

- Say it: **wǒ**, then **wǒ shì** — low and dipping, then falling
- Say it: **wǒ shì** followed by your own name, out loud, twice
- Write it: 我是

Before you move on

What does 是 do in 我是? (It links you to whatever comes next.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

8.3 名 — a mouth with something above it

Write □. Three strokes, and the box is not closed until the last one.

Script — the shape

名

Six strokes, and three of them are □, which you already own.

名 is 夕 sitting on top of □. The lower half is the mouth. The upper half is 夕, a shape this book has not taught you as a character of its own — here it is a piece, and naming it is enough:

1. 夕's upper falling stroke, down to the left
2. 夕's horizontal, continuing down-left without lifting — one stroke
3. 夕's inner dot, pressed down-right

4-6. □, complete. Left side; top and right in one turning stroke; the bottom bar closing it.

Five pen lifts.

Finish 夕 before you begin □ — the same instinct as finishing 日 before the body of 是, and finishing the sun before 十 in 早. You have now met that rule often enough that it should feel like the obvious thing to do.

A hook worth having, offered as a hook: 夕 is the shape used for **evening**, and a mouth beneath it reads easily as **speaking your name in the dark, when you cannot be seen**. That is a traditional story, not proven history — but 名 does mean **name**, and the picture makes the character stick.

Your turn

- *Write it:* □ alone, then 名 — and notice the last three strokes are identical
- *Write it:* 名 again, keeping stroke 2 unbroken
- *Say it:* míng — rising

Before you move on

Which half goes first? (**The top** — as always.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

8.4 字 — a child under a roof

Write 子, the child — the piece that stands beside 女 in 好.

Script — the shape

字

Six strokes, and the bottom three are 子, which you have written since the first chapter.

字 is 子 under a roof. The roof is 宀, a piece rather than a character — three strokes that make a lid:

1. 宀's **top dot**, pressed down-right
2. 宀's **left side**, a short stroke down-left
3. 宀's **horizontal roof**, running right and **hooking down-left** at its end — one stroke

4-6. **子, complete.** Its top horizontal turning down-left; its vertical with a left hook; its middle horizontal last.

Five pen lifts.

Roof before child. A covering piece is finished before whatever sits under it, which is the same habit as 日 before the body of 是 and 夕 before 口 in 名.

And now the meaning, which is the reason this character is worth the effort. 字 *zì* means **character** — a written Chinese character. It is the word for the thing you have been learning to make since the first page of this book. The roof-and-child picture is the traditional hook: something raised and kept under shelter.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 子 alone, then 字 — the difference is a roof
- *Write it:* 字, saying “roof first” before you start
- *Say it:* zì — falling

Before you move on

Which goes first, the roof or the child? (**The roof.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

8.5 名字 — the word for a name

Say **zǎoshang**. Second syllable light and short.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

名字 *míngzi* — **name**.

Both halves are characters you have just written, and both mean something:

- 名 *míng* — **name**
- 字 *zì* — **character**, a written unit

So the word is “**name-character**”, and that is not a stretched hook. A Chinese personal name *is* a small number of characters, usually two or three, each chosen deliberately for what it means. The word for “name” says what a name is made of.

The sounds and tones in this word

míngzi, not *míngzì*.

字 is fourth tone standing alone, and you practised it that way — but in this word it goes **neutral**, short and light, exactly as 上 did inside 早上. Second syllables do this often, and you now know the signal: **no tone mark means no tone**.

míng rises; *zi* rides on the end of it. [REPEAT x2]

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **zì** alone, falling — then **míngzi**, with the second syllable light
- **míngzi** twice, and say what each of its two halves means

Before you move on

Which syllable of *míngzi* carries no tone? (**The second.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

8.6 Practice — saying who you are

Say **wǒ shì** — low and dipping, then falling.

The exchange

Two people meet in the morning. The gap in the third line is yours to fill.

A: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

B: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

A: 我是 ...

wǒ shì ... — I am ... (your name).

B: 我是 ...

wǒ shì ... — I am ... (their name).

A: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

Say it with your own name in it, out loud. That is the first time this book has asked you for something it could not supply.

What you've built — and one thing deliberately withheld

You can now greet by time of day, say who you are, and leave. Every line is built from characters you have written.

One honest gap, and it is worth naming rather than hiding. You have the word for **name** — 名字 — but not yet the way to **ask** for someone's. The natural Mandarin question needs a word this book has not given you, and asking it with only the pieces you have would mean teaching you a sentence a speaker would not say. It is coming, and it is worth waiting for.

What 名字 buys you now is real: you can recognise the word when someone else uses it, and you know that a name is **characters** — which is why a Chinese speaker asked about their name will often tell you which characters it uses.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **wǒ shì**, then your own name, three times
- *Say it:* the whole exchange, taking both parts
- *Write it:* 我是, then 名字

Before you move on

Can you yet ask someone else for their name? (**Not yet** — and the book would rather say so than hand you a sentence nobody says.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 9

What?

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) ✍️ pen (2) 🗣️ Hands-free start: none of the 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write 什 and 么, ask 什么 to mean what, use it on its own to get something repeated, judge that it is blunt with a stranger, and I know its two characters carry the word's sound rather than its meaning.

The first exchange in the track that goes wrong – one speaker mishears – and the first the reader can repair, which matters more than another memorised line because it is what keeps a conversation alive when the Mandarin runs out.

9.1 什 — both halves are old news

Write 亻, the standing person — two strokes, at the left edge of a block.

Script — the shape

什

Four strokes, and after 我 that will feel like a rest.

什 is 亻 beside 十, and you have met both:

- 亻 you wrote in the very first word of this book, standing at the left of 你
- 十 you drew inside 早, underneath the sun

1. 𠂇's **falling stroke**, from the upper centre down to the left
2. 𠂇's **vertical**, straight down to the baseline
3. 十's **horizontal**, left to right
4. 十's **vertical**, down *through* that horizontal

Three pen lifts.

Finish 𠂇 before starting 十 — left before right, the oldest habit you have. And inside 十, horizontal before vertical, because the two cross.

A note on 十, since this is the second time it has turned up without being taught. It is the character for **ten**, and you still do not need to write it on its own. When it eventually arrives as a character in its own right, you will already have drawn it twice.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 𠂇 alone, then 什 — the second half is two strokes
- *Write it:* 什 again, saying “person, then ten”
- *Say it:* **shén** — rising

Before you move on

Which stroke of 十 comes first? (**The horizontal** — the two cross.)
Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

9.2 厶 — three strokes, and one of them turns

Write 什. Person on the left, ten on the right.

Script — the shape

厶

Three strokes, and the middle one does the work:

1. a short **falling stroke** at the top, down to the left

2. a second **falling stroke** down-left that **turns without lifting** and **sweeps right** along the base
3. a **dot**, pressed down-right

Two pen lifts.

Stroke 2 is one movement, not two: down-left, then a turn, then out to the right. Lift in the middle of it and you have written something else. You have handled this before — the frame of 再, the leg of 见 — and the instinct is the same: **the pen turns, the stroke does not end.**

The dot goes last, as it did in 我.

The sounds and tones in this word

么 is *me* — and that is the whole pronunciation. **No tone mark, because it has no tone.**

You met neutral syllables inside words, where 上 and 字 gave their tones up. 么 is different: it is neutral in the dictionary, standing alone. Some characters simply never carry a tone, and this is your first.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 么 — and keep stroke 2 unbroken through its turn
- *Say it:* **me** — short, light, flat, no shape to it at all

Before you move on

Why does this character have no tone mark? (**Because it has no tone.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

9.3 什么 — what

Say **me**. Short and flat, no tone at all.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

什么 *shénme* — **what**.

shén rises; *me* is light and toneless behind it. Both characters are ones

you have just written.

This one is different in kind from everything before it. 你好, 是, 不是, 再见, 早上好, 我是 — every one of those **gives** something. 什么 **asks**. It is the first word in this book whose job is to get something back from the other person.

Here the honest note this book owes you: the two halves of 什么 do **not** add up the way 再见's did. 再 and 见 each brought their meaning into the word. 什 and 么 bring only their **sound** — 什 is standing in for how this word is pronounced, not for anything it means.

And keep the levels apart. The pieces you drew *inside* 什 — the person and the ten — belong to that **character**, not to this **word**. “Person plus ten” explains nothing about *what*. Some words are built; some are just words.

Why it's said this way

什么? by itself means “**What?**” — the thing you say when you did not catch what someone said. That is real, everyday Mandarin and it is the most useful thing you can do with this word today.

One caution, because register matters and this book would rather tell you than let you find out. A bare 什么? is **blunt** — closer to English “What?” than to “Sorry?”. Between friends it is unremarkable. To a stranger, or to anyone you would be careful with, it lands harder than you intend, and Mandarin has gentler ways to ask for a repeat that need words you do not have yet.

So: use it, and know what it weighs.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **shénme** — rising, then light
- *Say it:* **shénme?** as a question, as though you missed something
- *Write it:* 什么

Before you move on

Do the two halves of 什么 add up to its meaning? (**No** — they are there for sound.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

9.4 Practice — when you did not catch it

Say **shénme** — rising, then light.

The exchange

Two people meet. One of them mishears. Fill both gaps with real names.

A: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

B: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

A: 我是 ...

wǒ shì ... — I am ...

B: 什么?

shénme? — what?

A: 我是 ...

wǒ shì ... — I am ... (said again, slower)

B: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

That fourth line is the point of the chapter. Until now every exchange in this book has gone perfectly, which is not what conversations do. **B did not catch it, said so, and got it repeated.** That is a repair, and being able to make one is worth more than another memorised phrase — it is what keeps a conversation alive when your Mandarin runs out.

What you've built — and the question you still cannot ask

You can greet by the hour, say who you are, ask for a repeat when you miss something, and leave.

The gap named last chapter is still open, and it is worth being precise

about what changed. You now have 什么, the *what* of “what is your name?” — but not yet the rest of that sentence. Both halves of the question exist in Mandarin; this book has handed you one of them. The other needs a character the font in this book cannot yet print, which is a dull reason, and a true one. So the honest position: 什么 is a question word you can use today in the ways above, and a piece of a question you will finish later.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole exchange, both parts, including the mishearing
- **shénme?** twice — once flat and clipped, once softened and drawn out on the rise. Same word; the second is the one you would risk on a stranger

Before you move on

Is a bare 什么? gentle or blunt? (**Blunt** — fine with friends, heavy with strangers.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 10

One Character, Two Courtesies

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ✍ pen (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write the speech radical 讠 and the twelve-stroke 谢, thank someone with 谢谢, answer thanks with 不谢, and predict from the rule alone that 不 rises before 谢 because 谢 is a falling tone.

A whole courtesy exchange bought with one new character – doubled for the thanks, negated for the reply – and the first place the reader predicts a tone change from a rule rather than being told how a word sounds.

10.1 讠 — the speech radical

Write 讠. Two strokes, squeezed to the left edge of a block.

Script — the shape

讠

Two strokes, one pen lift, and it is not a character. Like 亅, it is a **component** — a piece that lives at the left edge of other characters.

1. a **dot** at the top, pressed down and to the right
2. a short **horizontal**, which **turns down** and then **finishes rising** to the upper right — all one stroke, no lift

That second stroke does three things without stopping. You have handled worse: the frame of 再, the leg of 见, the turn in 么.

讠 **means speech**. It is the squeezed form of 言, the character for words and speaking, and it does the same job 讠 does: it tells you what the character is *about* before you know how to say it.

讠 joins 亻 as a component that carries **meaning** rather than sound, and the pair is worth holding together:

- 亻 at the left edge → the character is about a **person**
- 讠 at the left edge → the character is about **speech**

You will meet 讠 often. Every time you do, you can guess something true about the word before anyone tells you.

Your turn

Write these out:

- 讠 — dot, then one unbroken turning stroke
- 亻, then 讠, side by side — two meaning-carrying components

Before you move on

How many pen lifts does 讠 take? (**One.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

10.2 谢 — twelve strokes, and three pieces

Write 讠. Dot, then one turning stroke.

Script — the shape

谢

Twelve strokes. That is the longest thing in this book, and the number is about to stop mattering.

You were told once that stroke-counting gives out and structure takes over. This is where that pays off. 谢 is **three pieces, left to right**, and you have just written the first:

讠 + 身 + 寸

- 讠 — speech, two strokes, done
- 身 — a shape meaning *body*, seven strokes
- 寸 — a shape meaning *inch*, three strokes on the right

身 and 寸 are pieces, not characters you are being asked to own. Read them, place them, move on.

讠 (strokes 1-2). As you just practised.

身 (strokes 3-9). An upper falling stroke; the left side down; the top and right side in one turning stroke that hooks left at the base; two short inner horizontals; a wide horizontal beneath them; then a falling stroke down-left.

寸 (strokes 10-12). A horizontal; a vertical that hooks left at the base; and a dot, last.

Eleven pen lifts. **Left piece finished before the middle, middle before the right** — the oldest habit you have, applied to three pieces instead of two.

Compare it honestly with 我. 我 was seven strokes and had **no** pieces you could hold on to. 谢 is twelve and has three. **The long one is the easier one.** That is the whole argument for learning structure rather than counting.

Your turn

- Write it: 讠, then the middle piece, then the right piece — stopping between each
- Write it: 谢 straight through, and say “speech, body, inch” as you go
- Say it: xiè — falling

Before you move on

Which was harder to learn, this one or 我? (我 — and it is five strokes shorter.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

10.3 谢谢 — said twice

Say **xiè** — falling, from high to low.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

谢谢 *xièxiè* — **thank you**.

It is 谢 **written twice**. Nothing else. You learned one character and you have the word.

This is new, and it is not a quirk. Mandarin builds a great many words by **saying a piece twice**, and doubling usually softens something — it makes an action smaller, lighter, more everyday. That pattern is worth knowing; you will meet it again.

Two cautions about this particular word, so you do not over-apply it. 谢谢 **is a fixed expression**, not something you assemble fresh each time — it does not mean “to thank briefly”. And 谢 **is not said on its own**: it lives inside words, so do not reach for a bare 谢 and expect it to work.

The sounds and tones in this word

xièxiè, not *xièxiè*.

The first 谢 falls. The second **goes neutral** — short, light, no tone mark. You have seen this twice already, on 上 inside 早上 and on 字 inside 名字, and now on a syllable that is the *same character* as the one before it.

That is the useful lesson: **the light syllable is not a property of the character, it is a property of the word**. 谢 falls in this word’s first half and goes light in its second — and you will meet 谢 falling again, in its second position, before this chapter is out. [REPEAT x2]
Say it: *xiè* dropping, then *xiè* small and quick behind it.

Your turn

- Say it: **xiè** alone, falling — then **xièxiè**, with the second syllable light
- Say it: **xièxiè** twice, and say which of the two 谢 carries a tone
- Write it: 谢谢 — the same twelve strokes, twice

Before you move on

How many new characters did this word cost you? (**One**.)
Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

10.4 不谢 — answering thanks

Say **xièxie** — falling, then light.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

Someone thanks you. What do you say back?

不谢

不谢 — and it is made of two things you already have. 不, the negator you have carried since 好 and 不好, in front of 谢, which you learned an hour ago. Nothing new. You could have built this yourself. It works the way 不是 works: **put 不 in front of the word and you turn it**. Here turning it is a polite refusal of the thanks — *no need to thank me* — which is how a great many languages answer being thanked.

The sounds and tones in this word

Before you say it, work it out. 谢 is **fourth tone**. What does 不 do in front of a fourth tone?

It rises. *bú xiè*, not *bù xiè* — exactly as 不是 became *bú shì*.

This is the second time that rule has fired, and this time you were told the condition before the word. That is the difference between a rule you have been given and a rule you can use: **you can now predict the pronunciation of a word nobody has said to you yet**.

[REPEAT x2]

Why it's said this way

不谢 is real and correct, and it is not the commonest reply. The one you will hear most often needs two characters this book cannot yet print, so it is waiting. 不谢 will be understood everywhere, and it has the advantage of costing you nothing you did not already have.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **bú xiè** — the first syllable rising, and know why
- *Say it:* **bú shì**, then **bú xiè** — the same rule, twice
- *Write it:* 不谢

Before you move on

How many new characters did this reply cost you? (**None.**)
 Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

10.5 Practice — thanks, and the answer

Say **bú xiè**. Rising, then falling — and you know why the first one rises.

The exchange

A: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

B: 早上好

zǎoshang hǎo — good morning.

A: 谢谢

xièxie — thank you.

B: 不谢

bú xiè — you're welcome.

A: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

Six lines, and **one new character** paid for two of them.

What you've built — one character, a whole exchange

This chapter cost you 谢 and nothing else. Out of it came the thanks (谢谢, the same character twice) and the reply (不谢, a negator you already had). That is what a system does for you that a phrasebook cannot: pieces recombine.

Three things you did here without being led:

- you **doubled** a character to make a word, and knew the second half would go light;
- you **negated** a word to make its answer, the same move that turned 是 into 不是;
- and you **predicted a tone change** from a rule, before hearing the word said.

That last one is the real marker. Early on you were told what 你好 sounds like. Now you are told a rule and you work out what a word sounds like. Those are different kinds of knowing, and only the second one travels to words nobody has taught you.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the whole exchange, both parts
- *Say it:* **xièxie**, then **bú xiè** — light on the second, rising on the first
- *Write it:* 谢谢, then 不谢

Before you move on

Which two of these did you work out rather than being told? (**The light second syllable, and the rising 不.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 11

After You

Modes: ⇄ voice (2) ✍ pen (1) ⇄ **Hands-free start:** none of the 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can write 请, say it on its own to mean after you, explain that it invites rather than softens and so is used far less than English please, and I know a character half can point at the sound instead of the meaning.

A complete courtesy in four words, and the point at which the reader learns a character can carry two kinds of hint at once – one half for what it means, the other for how it sounds – which is what makes the writing system learnable rather than thousands of unrelated pictures.

11.1 请 — a half that tells you the sound

Write 讠. Dot, then one turning stroke. What does it tell you about the word? (**Speech.**)

Script — the shape

请

Ten strokes, two pieces, and 讠 is on the left again as you would expect.

讠 + 青

讠 (**strokes 1-2**). Speech. You know it.

青 (**strokes 3-10**). A top horizontal; a second horizontal; a vertical down through them; a wide middle horizontal; then the lower box — its left

side, then its top-and-right in one turning stroke that hooks at the base, then two short inner horizontals.

Nine pen lifts. 讠 **finished before** 青.

Now the part worth stopping for. In 谢, both halves pointed at **meaning** — speech, body, inch. Here the right half does something else entirely.

青 is said *qīng*. The whole character is said *qǐng*.

Say those two aloud, one after the other. Same consonant, same rest of the syllable; only the pitch differs. **The right half is not telling you what the word means. It is telling you how to say it.** That is a **phonetic component** — the job 尔 was doing inside 你, which you could only take on trust there. This time you can hear it. Once you can spot one you have a genuine reading strategy: meet an unknown character, find the half you recognise, and you often have a guess at the sound.

It is a guess and not a guarantee — the sound has drifted in plenty of characters over a few thousand years, and the tone in particular is often different, as it is here. But a guess beats nothing, and you will be right often.

Your turn

- Write it: 讠, then 青 — stopping between the two pieces
- Say it: *qīng*, then *qǐng* — the sound half, then the whole character
- Write it: 请 straight through

Before you move on

Is the sound half exactly right? (**Not quite** — the tone differs.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart; stroke order per the PRC standard *Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Bishun Guifan* (1997).

11.2 请 — please, and after you

Say *qǐng* — low and dipping, like *hǎo* and *wǒ*.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

请 *qǐng* — the word a dictionary will give you as **please**.

That translation is close enough to use and loose enough to mislead, so here is the more accurate version: 请 is closer to “**I ask you to**”, “**I**

invite you to”. Where English *please* softens a demand, 请 **hands the action over**.

Which is why it works **on its own**. Hold a door and say 请 — that is *after you, go ahead, be my guest*. Offer someone a seat and say 请. No other words needed, and none of them would be an apology for asking.

Why it’s said this way

English *please* is a **softener**. You bolt it onto a request to take the edge off, and you can put it almost anywhere: *please sit, sit, please, could you please sit*.

请 does not work like that. It comes **before the action it invites**, never bolted on after it — there is no Mandarin habit of tacking 请 onto the end of a request the way English tacks on *please*.

The consequence is practical, and it surprises learners: **Mandarin uses 请 far less often than English uses please** — and with people you are close to it can sound distant rather than polite. Leaving it out is not rude the way dropping *please* can be in English. Warmth in Mandarin is carried more by what you say and how you say it than by a single courtesy word.

So: use 请 to hand something over or to invite. Do not reach for it every time you would say *please* in English — you would sound stilted rather than polite.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- qǐng on its own, as though holding a door open
- qǐng, then xièxie — the invitation, then the thanks

Before you move on

Does Mandarin use 请 as often as English uses *please*? (**No** — far less.)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

11.3 Practice — after you

Say qǐng — low and dipping.

The exchange

Two people reach a door at the same time.

A: 请

qǐng — after you.

B: 谢谢

xièxiè — thank you.

A: 不谢

bú xiè — you're welcome.

B: 再见

zàijiàn — goodbye.

Four lines, four words, and a complete small courtesy. Nobody in it asks for anything or explains anything, and it still works — which is most of what courtesy is.

What you've built — a component that predicts

Consider what the two halves of this chapter's character bought you. 讠 **on the left** told you the word was about speech before you knew what it meant — and it did the same in 谢. Two characters, one component, one reliable guess.

青 **on the right** told you roughly how to say it. You were told once before that a half could do this — 尔, on the right of 你 — but you had to take it on trust, because 尔 is *ěr* and nothing in it sounds like *nǐ*. Here you can hear it for yourself: *qīng*, *qǐng*.

So the claim made in passing back then is now one you can check: a Chinese character can carry **two kinds of hint at once**, one for what it means and one for how it is said. That is the single most useful thing to know about reading Chinese, and it is why the writing system is learnable at all rather than being thousands of unrelated pictures. You will not always get both hints, and neither is a promise. But from here on, when you meet a character you do not know, you have something to do other than look it up: **find the half you recognise**,

and ask which job it is doing.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the whole exchange, both parts
- *Say it:* **qǐng**, **xièxie**, **bú xiè** — three courtesies in a row
- *Write it:* 请, then 谢 — and say what their left halves have in common

Before you move on

Which half of 请 would help you guess its pronunciation? (**The right.**)

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 12

People under one roof

Modes:  voice (10)  eyes (2)  pen (2)  Hands-free start: first 3 of 14 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write six HSK Level 1 people-and-family words, building 儿子, 女儿 and 家人 only after their spoken meanings and component characters are secure.

Six family words pass separate listening, speaking, reading and no-model writing checks; pinyin cannot compensate for an unread character, and a strong skill cannot compensate for a weak one.

12.1 人 — a person

Write the two-stroke figure, then say **wǒ** — I.

What to know first

人 — *rén* — **person**

Hear the rising tone first. Say *rén*. Now read the character you already know. The meaning is singular here: one person. Number comes from context or another word; the character itself does not grow a plural ending.

Your turn

Say **person** in Mandarin. Read 人. Cover it, wait five seconds, and write it.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 170.

12.2 女 — female, woman

Say **person**, then write the three-stroke left half of 好.

What to know first

女 — *nǚ* — **female; woman**

Say it low: *nǚ*. The rounded vowel is the same written **ü** you met in the character lesson. On its own, 女 labels female gender; it is not a polite way to call out to a woman. Here you are learning the word for reading and building.

Your turn

Read 女, cover it, and write it from the meaning cue **female**.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 152.

12.3 Hear *érzi* — son

Say **person**, then **female**.

What to know first

érzi — **son**

Hear two beats: rising *ér*, then a short, light *zi*. Say the whole word once from the meaning. Keep the characters covered; the new first shape comes next.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 48.

12.4 儿 — fall, then bend and hook

Say **son**, then write 儿.

Script — the shape

儿

Two strokes. First a short fall down-left. Then start high on the right, descend, bend right along the floor, and hook upward **without lifting**. Unlike 人, the two strokes do not meet at the top.

Your turn

Trace 儿 once. Copy it once. Point to the bend that keeps it apart from 人.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 儿, pinned stroke paths and medians.

12.5 儿子 — son on the page

Say **son**, then write 儿 and 子 separately.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

儿子 — *érzi* — **son**

The first syllable rises. The second is light. Both characters carry child meanings, but the whole word—not either character alone—is the ordinary kinship word **son**.

Your turn

Copy 儿子 once while saying *ér-zi*. Then read it once without pinyin.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 48.

12.6 Hear *nǚ'ér* — daughter

Say **female**, then **son**.

What to know first

nǚ'ér — **daughter**

Say two clear syllables: low *nǚ*, rising *ér*. The apostrophe only keeps the vowel boundary visible in pinyin. It is not a pause and not part of the Chinese writing.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 153.

12.7 女儿 — daughter on the page

Say **daughter**, then write 女 and 儿 separately.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

女儿 — *nǚ'ér* — **daughter**

Nothing is hidden: 女 gives female and 儿 gives child. Read the two characters without the pinyin, then say the whole word without a pause.

Your turn

Look at 女儿, cover it, wait five seconds, and write it from **daughter**.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 153.

12.8 Hear *jiā* — home, family

Say **daughter**, then **son**.

What to know first

jiā — **home; family**

Hold the pitch high and level: *jiā*. The word can name the household place or the family belonging to it. Keep the character covered; it has ten strokes, and the next lesson gives them to you in two familiar-sized pieces.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 86.

12.9 家 — roof first, body second

Say **home**, then write the roof from 宀 and the whole character 家.

Script — the shape

宀 + 豕 → 家

Finish the three-stroke roof first. Under it, write the lower body from its top horizontal through the centre curve, three left-falling strokes, and the long right-falling finish. Ten strokes; nine lifts.

The old lower component is 豕, livestock. That decomposition is real history and a useful shape boundary. It is not a claim that a present-day home or family is defined by an animal.

Your turn

Trace 家 once. Copy it once, saying **roof**, then **body**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 家, pinned stroke paths and medians.

12.10 家 — home on the page

Say **home or family**, then write 宀.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

家 — *jiā* — home; family

Read it once without pinyin. The high line over *ā* records first tone; the character records no tone mark at all.

Your turn

Copy 家 once from the model. Name the roof before you write the lower body.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 86.

12.11 Hear *jiārén* — family members

Say **home or family**, then **person**.

What to know first

jiārén — family members; family

You already own both sounds: *jiā* + *rén*. The compound names the people of the home. Say it once from the meaning before looking at either character.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 87.

12.12 家人 — the people of the home

Say **family members**, then write 家 and 人 separately.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

家人 — *jiārén* — family members; family

Read from the characters: home + person. The word is plural by

meaning here, but Mandarin adds no plural ending to 人.

Your turn

Look at 家人, cover it, wait five seconds, and write it from **family**.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entry 87.

12.13 Retrieve six people and family words

Say **name**, then write 儿 and 家.

Your turn

Hear the six words in a shuffled order and point to meanings. Then take six meaning cards, say each word, read the six character cards, and write only the two you missed. Repair one item at a time.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary entries 48, 87, and 153.

12.14 Payoff — six family words in four skills

Say **name**, then write 儿 and 家 without a model.

Your turn

1. **Listening:** hear six words in mixed order and choose each meaning.
2. **Speaking:** produce all six from meaning cards, with tones audible.
3. **Reading:** read the six character cards without pinyin.
4. **Writing:** hear all six and write them without a model.

Pass each skill separately. If one misses, repair that skill and retry only that part. This is a family vocabulary map, not yet a full family-description task.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 task outline pp. 2–3 and vocabulary entries 48, 86–87, 152–153, and 170.

Chapter 13

From study to university student

Modes:  voice (11)  eyes (3)  pen (3)  Hands-free start: first 1 of 17 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write six HSK Level 1 size-and-school words, gaining 大, 学 and 生 one gently staged character at a time before recombining them as 大家, 学生, 大学 and 大学生.

Three newly secured characters produce six useful words, each checked separately in listening, speaking, unassisted reading and no-model writing.

13.1 Hear *dà* — big

Say **home** and **family members**.

What to know first

dà — **big**; large

Let the voice fall firmly on the single syllable: *dà*. Keep the character covered for now. The next lesson gives its three strokes one at a time.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.2 大 — one bar, two falls

Say **big** in Mandarin.

Script — the shape

一 + 丿 + ㇏ → 大

Write the horizontal first. Start the left-falling stroke above it and cross through it. Lift once more, return to the crossing, and fall long to the right.

Your turn

Trace 大 once. Copy it once while saying **bar, left, right**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 大, pinned stroke paths and medians.

13.3 大 — big on the page

Say **big**, then point to the first stroke of 大.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

大 — *dà* — **big; large**

Read the character without pinyin. Then say it once with a clear fourth-tone fall.

Your turn

Copy 大 once from the model. Keep the crossing near the centre.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.4 Hear *dàjiā* — everyone

Say *dà*, then *jiā*.

What to know first

dàjiā — **everyone; everybody**

Hear two beats: falling *dà*, then level *jiā*. The whole word means everyone. Its written form will contain only characters you already know.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.5 大家 — everyone on the page

Write 大, then 家 with a small gap.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

大家 — *dàjiā* — **everyone**

Close the gap. Read the two characters as one word and keep both tone shapes.

Your turn

Look at 大家, cover it, then write it once from memory.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.6 Hear *xué* — study, learn

Say **everyone**.

What to know first

xué — **study; learn**

Begin low enough to rise clearly through *xué*. Stay with sound and meaning; the eight-stroke character comes next in small groups.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.7 学 — top, cover, child

Say **study**, then write 子.

Script — the shape

丷 + 冂 + 子 → 学

Place the three short marks across the top. Add the covering dot and hooked line. Finish with the familiar three strokes of 子 below. Eight strokes total; do not let the top marks crowd the child.

Your turn

Trace 学 once. Copy it once while saying **top, cover, child**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 学, pinned stroke paths and medians.

13.8 学 — study on the page

Say **study**, then point to 子 inside 学.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

学 — *xué* — **study; learn**

Read it without pinyin, then give the syllable a clear rise.

Your turn

Copy 学 once. Pause mentally after the top, after the cover, and after 子.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.9 Hear *xuésheng* — student

Say **study**.

What to know first

xuésheng — **student**

Rise on *xué*. Keep *sheng* short and light. Hold the second character back; the next lesson gives its five strokes.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.10 生 — five measured strokes

Say **student**.

Script — the shape

Begin with the short left-fall. Add the upper horizontal and the shorter middle horizontal. Draw the vertical through their centres, then anchor everything with the long bottom horizontal. Five strokes; four lifts.

Your turn

Trace 生 once. Copy it once while saying **fall, two bars, through, base**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 生, pinned stroke paths and medians.

13.11 学生 — student on the page

Point to 学, then 生. Say **study**, then **student**.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

学生 — *xuésheng* — **student**

Read the two-character word without pinyin. Keep the second syllable light.

Your turn

Copy 学生 once. Finish all of 学 before beginning 生.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.12 Hear *dàxué* — university

Say **big**, then **study**.

What to know first

dàxué — **university; college**

Let *dà* fall, then let *xué* rise. Together they name a university or college.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.13 大学 — university on the page

Read 大 and 学 separately.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

大学 — *dàxué* — **university; college**

Now read the pair as one word: fall, then rise.

Your turn

Look at 大学, cover it, and write it once from memory.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.14 Hear *dàxuésheng* — university student

Say **university**, then **student**.

What to know first

dàxuésheng — **university student**

Say three beats: falling *dà*, rising *xué*, light *sheng*. Do not repeat *xué*; the two familiar words overlap there.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.15 大学生 — university student on the page

Read 大学, then 学生.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

大学生 — *dàxuésheng* — **university student**

Track three characters and three beats. The middle 学 belongs to the whole word only once.

Your turn

Look at 大学生, cover it, and write it once. Check one character at a time.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.16 Retrieve six size and school words

Write 大, 学, and 生 once each from memory.

Your turn

Hear the six words in shuffled order and point to meanings. Then say each word from a meaning card, read each character card, and write only the missed items. Repair one word at a time.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

13.17 Payoff — six school words in four skills

Write 大, 学, and 生 without a model.

Your turn

1. **Listening:** hear six words in mixed order and choose every meaning.
2. **Speaking:** produce all six from meaning cards, with tones audible.
3. **Reading:** read all six character cards without pinyin.
4. **Writing:** hear all six and write them without a model.

Pass each skill separately. Repair and retry only the failed skill. This is a school vocabulary checkpoint, not yet a full conversation about education.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 task outline and vocabulary.

Chapter 14

One small step into school

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 👁️ eyes (2) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write 小, 小学 and 小学生, gaining only the three-stroke 小 before recombining it with the already secure 学 and 生.

One new glyph expands into three official Level 1 words, each checked independently in listening, speaking, unassisted reading and no-model writing.

14.1 Hear *xiǎo* — small

Say **big** and **university**.

What to know first

xiǎo — **small; little**

Keep the voice low through the third tone: *xiǎo*. Work only with sound and meaning. Its three-stroke character comes next.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

14.2 小 — centre, left, right

Say **small** in Mandarin.

Script — the shape

Draw the centre vertical first and finish its hook without lifting. Add the short left-falling mark. Finish with the right dot, leaving air around the centre. Three strokes; two lifts.

Your turn

Trace 小 once. Copy it once while saying **centre, left, right**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 小, pinned stroke paths and medians.

14.3 小 — small on the page

Say **small**, then point to the first stroke of 小.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

小 — *xiǎo* — **small; little**

Read the character without pinyin, then say it with a low third tone.

Your turn

Copy 小 once. Keep the side marks shorter than the centre stroke.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

14.4 Hear *xiǎoxué* — primary school

Say **small**, then **study**.

What to know first

xiǎoxué — **primary school; elementary school**

Keep *xiǎo* low, then let *xué* rise. No new character is hiding in this word.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

14.5 小学 — primary school on the page

Read 小, then 学.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

小学 — *xiǎoxué* — **primary school**

Read the pair as one word without pinyin: low, then rising.

Your turn

Look at 小学, cover it, and write it once from memory.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

14.6 Hear *xiǎoxuésheng* — primary-school student

Say **primary school**, then **student**.

What to know first

xiǎoxuésheng — **primary-school student**

Say three beats: low *xiǎo*, rising *xué*, light *sheng*. 学 appears only once where the two familiar words overlap.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

14.7 小学生 — primary-school student on the page

Read 小学, then point to 生.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

小学生 — *xiǎoxuésheng* — **primary-school student**

Track three characters and three beats. Read it once without pinyin.

Your turn

Look at 小学生, cover it, and write it once. Check one character at a time.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

14.8 Retrieve three primary-school words

Write 小, 学, and 生 once each from memory.

Your turn

Hear **small**, **primary school**, and **primary-school student** in mixed order. Say, read, and write each. Then contrast 大学 with 小学 and 大学生 with 小学生. Repair only the missed item.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

14.9 Payoff — three primary-school words in four skills

Write 小, 学, and 生 without a model.

Your turn

1. **Listening:** hear the three forms in mixed order and choose each meaning.
2. **Speaking:** produce all three from meaning cards, with tones audible.
3. **Reading:** read all three character cards without pinyin.
4. **Writing:** hear all three and write them without a model.

Pass each skill separately. Repair and retry only the failed skill.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 task outline and vocabulary.

Chapter 15

A wider school map

Modes: 🗣️ voice (13) 👁️ eyes (2) ✍️ pen (2) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 17 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write 中学, 中学生, 同学 and 上学 after gaining only 中 and 同 through source-verified, gently staged handwriting practice.

Four official Level 1 school words are retrieved across four spaced reviews, then checked independently in listening, speaking, unassisted reading and no-model writing.

15.1 Hear *zhōng* — middle

Say **small** in Mandarin.

What to know first

zhōng — **middle; centre**

Hold one high, level tone: *zhōng*. Stay with sound and meaning. The written shape comes next.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.2 中 — close, then pass through

Say **middle** in Mandarin.

Script — the shape

Reuse □'s three-stroke box: left side; joined top and right; closing bottom. Only then draw the long centre vertical through the box. Four strokes; three lifts.

Your turn

Trace 中 once. Copy it once while saying **box, close, through**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 中, pinned stroke paths and medians.

15.3 中 — middle on the page

Say **middle**, then point to 中's last stroke.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

中 — *zhōng* — **middle; centre**

Read the character without pinyin, then hold its first tone level.

Your turn

Copy 中 once. Check that the box closes before the centre line.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.4 Hear *zhōngxué* — middle school

Say **middle**, then **study**.

What to know first

zhōngxué — **middle school**

Hold *zhōng* level, then let *xué* rise. Hear the whole school word before seeing its two characters.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.5 中学 — middle school on the page

Read 中, then 学.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

中学 — *zhōngxué* — **middle school**

Read the pair without pinyin: level, then rising.

Your turn

Look at 中学, cover it, and write it once from memory.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.6 Retrieval 1 — middle and middle school

Say **middle** without looking.

Your turn

Hear **middle** and **middle school** in mixed order. Say each, read its card, then write it once. Repair only the missed item.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.7 Hear *zhōngxuésheng* — middle-school student

Say **middle school**, then **student**.

What to know first

zhōngxuésheng — **middle-school student**

Say three beats: level *zhōng*, rising *xué*, light *sheng*. The shared *xué* is spoken only once.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.8 中学生 — middle-school student on the page

Read 中学, then point to 生.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

中学生 — *zhōngxuésheng* — **middle-school student**

Read all three characters once without pinyin.

Your turn

Hear *zhōngxuésheng*, then write 中学生 without looking. Check one character at a time.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.9 Hear *tóngxué* — classmate

Say **study** in Mandarin.

What to know first

tóngxué — **classmate; schoolmate**

Let both syllables rise: *tóng-xué*. Keep working only with sound and meaning. The first character comes next.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.10 同 — frame, line, box

Say **classmate**, then air-write 同.

Script — the shape

Draw the outer left side. Lift for the joined outer top and right side, ending with its small hook. Add the inner horizontal. Finish the familiar 口 inside: left, joined top-right, closing bottom. Six strokes; five lifts.

Your turn

Trace 同 once. Copy it once while saying **frame, line, box**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 同, pinned stroke paths and medians.

15.11 同学 — classmate on the page

Read 同, then 学.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

同学 — *tóngxué* — **classmate; schoolmate**

Read the pair without pinyin. Both syllables rise.

Your turn

Copy 同学 once. Keep the inner □ inside 同's open-bottom outer frame.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.12 Retrieval 2 — school and people

Write 中 and 同 from memory.

Your turn

Hear **middle school**, **middle-school student**, and **classmate** in mixed order. Say, read, and write each. Repair one word at a time.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.13 Hear *shàngxué* — go to school

Say **up** / **on**, then **study**.

What to know first

shàngxué — **go to school; attend school**

Drop firmly on *shàng*, then rise on *xué*. No new character is hiding in the word.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.14 上学 — go to school on the page

Read 上, then 学.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

上学 — *shàngxué* — go to school; attend school

Read the pair without pinyin: falling, then rising.

Your turn

Look at 上学, cover it, and write it once from memory.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.15 Retrieval 3 — place, person, classmate, action

Write 中 and 同, then read 学.

Your turn

Shuffle four meaning cards: **middle school**, **middle-school student**, **classmate**, **go to school**. Say, read, and write each. Sort them as place, person, relationship, or action.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.16 Retrieval 4 — the full school ladder

Write 小, 中, and 大 from memory.

Your turn

Build two three-item rows without a model: primary / middle / university; then primary-school / middle-school / university students. Read both rows aloud. Add 同学 and 上学 from meaning cards.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

15.17 Payoff — four school compounds in four skills

Write 中, 同, 上, 学, and 生 without a model.

Your turn

1. **Listening:** hear the four words in mixed order and choose each meaning.
2. **Speaking:** produce all four from meaning cards, with tones audible.
3. **Reading:** read all four character cards without pinyin.
4. **Writing:** hear all four and write them without a model.

Pass each skill separately. Repair and retry only the failed skill.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 task outline and vocabulary.

Chapter 16

Character or language?

Modes: 🗣️ voice (8) 👁️ eyes (1) ✍️ pen (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 15 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write 字, 汉字 and 汉语 after gaining 汉 and 语 through source-verified observation, tracing, guided copying and delayed recall.

Three identity words are retrieved across two expanding reviews, then checked independently in listening, speaking, unassisted reading and no-model writing.

16.1 Hear *zì* — a written character

Say **middle school** in Mandarin.

What to know first

zì — a written Chinese character

You heard a light *zi* at the end of *míngzi*. Standing alone, this word has a sharp falling tone: *zì*. Stay with sound and meaning for this tiny step.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.2 字 — the familiar shape stands alone

Say **written character** in Mandarin.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

字 — *zì* — a written Chinese character

Hide the pinyin. Read 字 from its familiar roof-over-child shape, then say its falling tone. You are attaching a standalone word to writing you already know.

Your turn

Look at 字 for three seconds. Cover it, wait five seconds, then write it once. Check only two things: roof before child, and six strokes.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.3 Hear *hànzì* — Chinese character

Say *zì* and its meaning.

What to know first

hànzì — Chinese character; Han character

The second half is your known *zì*, written character. The first half, *hàn*, labels it as Han Chinese. Hear two clean falling tones: *hàn-zì*. The new first character stays hidden until the next lesson.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.4 汉 — watch five strokes

Say Chinese character, then point to the new first half of 汉字.

Script — the shape

In 𠂇, write 丶 first. On the right, stroke four crosses right and turns down-left without lifting. Stroke five falls down-right. Five strokes; four lifts. Watch the crossing open into two different falling directions.

Your turn

Trace 𠂇 once, slowly. Say **dot, dot, rise; turn left; fall right**.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 𠂇, pinned stroke paths and medians.

16.5 𠂇 — copy with a five-part cue

Air-write 丶 : dot, dot, rise.

Your turn

Copy 𠂇 twice while the model remains visible. First say the five-part cue. On the second copy, pause after 丶 and check that the right side still has only two strokes.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 𠂇, pinned stroke paths and medians.

16.6 𠂇 — hold the route briefly

Look at 𠂇 for five seconds. Cover it.

Your turn

Study 𠂇 for five seconds. Cover it. Say the five-part cue, wait five more seconds, then write once. Reveal the model and repair only the first wrong stroke; do not copy the whole character again unless needed.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 汉, pinned stroke paths and medians.

16.7 汉字 — two known routes, one word

Say **Chinese character** in Mandarin.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

汉字 — *hànzì* — **Chinese character**

Read the two characters first without pinyin: Han Chinese + written character.

Your turn

Copy 汉字 once. Leave a small, even gap; do not merge the two squares.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.8 Hear *hànyǔ* — the Chinese language

Say **Chinese character** in Mandarin.

What to know first

hànyǔ — **the Chinese language; Mandarin**

Keep the known falling *hàn*. Then let *yǔ* dip in third tone. The new written half waits; today the contrast is heard: *hànzì* is a character, *hànyǔ* is the language.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.9 Retrieval 1 — 字 and 汉字

Say and write **written character** without a model.

Your turn

Hear **written character** and **Chinese character** in mixed order. Say each answer, read its unpointed card, then write it without a model. Repair only the missed item.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.10 语 — speech, five, box

Air-write 讠, then say *hànyǔ*.

Script — the shape

Write 讠 first. On the right, build 五 from top to bottom, then close 口 at the base. Nine strokes; eight lifts. Keep the speech side narrow so the right side has room.

Your turn

Trace 语 once. Say **speech, five, box** as your hand crosses the three parts.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 语, pinned stroke paths and medians.

16.11 语 — copy, then fade

Say **the Chinese language**, then point across 语 and say **speech, five, box**.

Your turn

Copy 语 once beside the model. Cover it halfway. Copy again from the visible half, keeping 讠 narrow and the final 口 closed.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 语, pinned stroke paths and medians.

16.12 语 — wait, then write

Say **the Chinese language**. Look at 语 for five seconds, then cover it.

Your turn

Tap once for every lift while saying **speech, five, box**. Now write 语 without uncovering the model. Compare only after you finish.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 语, pinned stroke paths and medians.

16.13 汉语 — the language in writing

Say **the Chinese language** in Mandarin.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

Read this before looking below:

汉语

It joins Han Chinese + language: *hànyǔ*, **the Chinese language**.

Your turn

Copy 汉语 once. Keep two separate squares and read the whole word aloud.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.14 Retrieval 2 — character or language?

Say and write **the Chinese language** without a model.

Your turn

Hear **written character**, **Chinese character**, and **Chinese language** in a mixed order. Say, read, and write each answer. For the two 汉 compounds, listen for the ending before choosing 字 or 语.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

16.15 Checkpoint — 字, 汉字, 汉语

Write 汉 and 语 without a model.

Your turn

1. **Listening:** hear the three words in mixed order and choose each meaning.
2. **Speaking:** produce all three from meaning cards, with tones audible.
3. **Reading:** read 字, 汉语, 汉字 cold and give each meaning.
4. **Writing:** hear **Chinese character** and **Chinese language**, then write both without a model.

Pass each skill separately. Check the 字 or 语 ending only after both written words are complete.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

Chapter 17

Language or country?

Modes: 🗣️ voice (9) 👁️ eyes (1) ✍️ pen (7) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 17 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write 中文 and 中国, keep all five identity words distinct, and score listening, speaking, reading and writing separately.

Two new identity words and the three earlier forms return at expanding intervals before separate listening, speaking, cold reading and no-model writing scores.

17.1 Hear *zhōngwén* — Chinese

From the last chapter, say 汉语, 汉字, 字 for **Chinese language, Chinese character, written character**. Then say the sound of 中: *zhōng*.

What to know first

zhōngwén — **Chinese; the Chinese language**

Keep the level first tone in *zhōng*. Let *wén* rise in second tone. The new second character stays hidden for now; this step is only sound and meaning.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.2 文 — watch four open strokes

Say **go to school** as *shàngxué* and write 谢 once from memory.
Then say **Chinese language** as *zhōngwén*.

Script — the shape

Write 文 in four separate strokes: top dot, horizontal bar, long fall left, long fall right. The last two strokes begin near the centre and open in opposite directions. Four strokes; three lifts.

Your turn

Trace 文 once. Say **dot, bar, left, right** as your hand moves.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 文, pinned stroke paths and medians.

17.3 文 — copy with the route visible

Read 上学, say **thank you** in Mandarin, then air-write **dot, bar, left, right**.

Your turn

Copy 文 twice beside the model. On the second copy, pause after the bar and check that the two long falling strokes still open from the centre.

Your turn — Spaced Return

From the cues **thank you** and **go to school**, say 谢谢 and write 上学 once.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 文, pinned stroke paths and medians.

17.4 文 — wait, then open the two falls

Answer 谢谢 with 不谢. Then look at 文 for five seconds and cover it.

Your turn

Say **dot, bar, left, right**, then write 文 once without the model. Reveal it only after the fourth stroke. Repair only the first mismatch.

Your turn — Spaced Return

Hear **you are welcome** and write 不谢 without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 文, pinned stroke paths and medians.

17.5 中文 — two known squares

Run the two-line 谢谢 / 不谢 exchange. Then take one Chapter 15 school-word meaning card: hear its Mandarin word, write it, read it aloud, and give its meaning. Finally say **Chinese language** as *zhōngwén*.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

Read this before looking below:

中文

It joins China or middle + writing or language: *zhōngwén*, **Chinese**.

Your turn

Copy 中文 once. Keep the two squares separate and let 文 open at the base.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.6 Longer return — character or language?

Read 中文. Write 请 and point to its 青 sound component. Then write **written character** without a model.

Your turn

Hear **Chinese character** and **Chinese language** in mixed order. Say each, read its unpointed card, then write it. Listen for the ending before choosing 字 or 语.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.7 Hear *zhōngguó* — China

Say **please**, then say **Chinese language** as *zhōngwén*.

What to know first

zhōngguó — **China**

The first syllable stays *zhōng*. Change the rising ending: *wén* names writing or language; *guó* names a country. The new written ending waits one lesson.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.8 国 — frame, inside, close

Say **China**. Put 请 before a familiar request, then air-write the opening two strokes of a box without closing it.

Script — the shape

Write 国 in eight strokes. Open the outer frame with its left side, then top-and-right. Finish every stroke of 玉 inside. Only then add the bottom bar that closes the frame. Eight strokes; seven lifts.

Your turn

Trace 国 once. Say **frame, three bars, upright, dot, close**. Keep the bottom open until the inner dot is finished.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 国, pinned stroke paths and medians.

17.9 国 — copy with the frame open

Say the meaning of 人 and write 汉 once from memory. Then say **frame, inside, close**.

Your turn

Copy 国 twice beside the model. On the second copy, pause after the inner dot. Check that the outer bottom is still open; then close it with stroke eight.

Your turn — Spaced Return

From the cues **person** and **Han**, say 人 and write 汉 once without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 国, pinned stroke paths and medians.

17.10 国 — wait before closing

Say what 女 means. Then look at 国 for five seconds and cover it.

Your turn

Say **frame, inside, close**, then write 国 once without the model. Do not uncover it until the bottom bar is complete.

Your turn — Spaced Return

Hear **woman** and write 女 without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 国, pinned stroke paths and medians.

17.11 中国 — China in two squares

Say **son** as *érzi*, then say **China** as *zhōngguó*.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

Read this before looking below:

中国

The shared 中 is followed by 国, country: *zhōngguó*, **China**.

Your turn

Copy 中国 once. In 国, finish the inner 玉 before closing the bottom.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.12 Retrieval 1 — language or country?

Write 儿 once from memory. Then say and write **Chinese language** without a model.

Your turn

Hear **Chinese language** and **China** in mixed order. Say each answer, read its unpointed card, then write it. Keep 中 and retrieve the correct ending.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.13 Longer return — the older three

Say **the Chinese language** with the 汉 beginning.

Your turn

Without looking back, write **written character**, **Chinese character**, and **Chinese language**. Read each answer aloud only after all three are complete.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.14 Listening score — five meanings

Say **daughter**, then say **Chinese language** with 中 and **China**.

Your turn

Keep the page covered. Hear the five Mandarin words in mixed order and give the English meaning of each. Then reverse the cards and say all five Mandarin forms. Score listening and speaking separately out of five.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.15 Reading score — no pinyin

Read 中国 and 中文 without saying their pinyin first.

Your turn

Shuffle five unpointed cards: 汉语, 字, 中国, 汉字, 中文. Read each card and give its meaning. Score one point per form; pronunciation help comes only after the reading score is recorded.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.16 Writing score — from sound, no model

Say what 家 means. Write 家, 汉, 语, 文, 国 without a model.
Check only after all five are complete.

Your turn

First say what 家 means, then recover 汉, 语, 文, 国 once from their spoken syllables. Next hear **Chinese character**, **Chinese language with 汉**, **Chinese language with 中**, and **China** in mixed order. Write all four without a model. Score the four whole words first; then repair only a missed character.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

17.17 Payoff — five identity words

Write 家, 文, and 国 without a model, then name each aloud.

Your turn

1. **Listening**, /5: hear all five words in mixed order and choose each meaning.
2. **Speaking**, /5: produce all five from meaning cards, with tones audible.
3. **Reading**, /5: read 中国, 汉语, 字, 中文, 汉字 cold, without pinyin.
4. **Writing**, /5: hear all five meanings and write each form without a model.

Pass each skill separately. A miss in one column does not cancel the other three. For repair, revisit only the missed form and retry that skill.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

Chapter 18

Looking and reading

Modes: 🗣️ voice (11) 👁️ eyes (6) ✍️ pen (6) 🗣️ Hands-free start: none of the 23 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write 看, 看见, 好看, 书 and 看书, and score listening, speaking, reading and writing separately.

Two carefully staged characters support five nearby meanings, expanding retrieval and separate listening, speaking, cold-reading and no-model writing scores.

18.1 Hear *kàn* — look or watch

Say **Chinese language** and **China** in Mandarin. Keep those answers separate, then put the cards away.

What to know first

kàn — look at; watch

Start high and let the tone fall cleanly. The written form stays hidden in this first step so sound and meaning can settle before handwriting begins.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.2 看 — a hand above an eye

Say **look or watch** as *kàn*. Then write the familiar 中 once and put it away before meeting the new shape.

Script — the shape

Write 看 in nine strokes. Make the short top stroke first, then the two crossing strokes and the long left fall above. Finish with 目 below: left, top-and-right, two inner bars, bottom. Nine strokes; eight lifts.

Your turn

Trace 看 once. Say **hand above, eye below** while keeping the lower box wide enough for its two inner bars.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 看, pinned stroke paths and medians.

18.3 看 — copy hand above, eye below

Read 中文 and give its meaning. Then air-write **hand above, eye below**.

Your turn

Copy 看 twice beside the model. On the second copy, pause before 目 and check that the long falling stroke points toward the eye rather than through it.

Your turn — Spaced Return

Hear **Chinese language with** 中 and write 中文 once without pinyin.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 看, pinned stroke paths and medians.

18.4 看 — wait, then recover the eye

Write 中国 from the meaning **China**. Then look at 看 for five seconds and cover it.

Your turn

Say **hand above, eye below**, then write 看 once without the model. Reveal it only after all nine strokes. Repair only the first mismatch.

Your turn — Spaced Return

Hear **China** once more and write 中国 without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 看, pinned stroke paths and medians.

18.5 看 — the familiar sound meets the shape

Say **look at or watch** in Mandarin.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

看 — *kàn* — look at; watch

Hide the pinyin. Read 看 from the hand-over-eye shape, say the falling tone, then give the meaning. One form now connects listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Your turn

Hear *kàn*. Wait three seconds, then write 看 once without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.6 Hear *kànjiàn* — see

Say **look or watch** as *kàn*, then say **goodbye** as *zàijiàn*.

What to know first

kànjiàn — **see; catch sight of**

Both syllables fall. The familiar *jiàn* now follows *kàn*: you look and successfully perceive. Keep the characters hidden for this sound-first step.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.7 看见 — looking reaches seeing

Say **see** as *kànjiàn*. Write 看, then point to 见 in 再见.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

看见 — *kànjiàn* — **see; catch sight of**

Read the two known shapes from left to right. 看 supplies looking; 见 marks the perceived result.

Your turn

Copy 看见 once. Leave a clear boundary between the nine-stroke 看 and the four-stroke 见.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.8 Hear *hǎokàn* — good-looking

Say **good, look**, and **see** as three separate Mandarin answers.

What to know first

hǎokàn — **good-looking; nice to look at**

Let *hǎo* dip, then let *kàn* fall. This is a description, not an instruction to look. The characters wait until the next tiny step.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.9 好看 — good to look at

Say **good-looking** as *hǎokàn*. Write 好 and 看 separately.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

好看 — *hǎokàn* — **good-looking; nice to look at**

No new character is hiding here. Read 好, then 看, and let the literal pieces carry you to the whole meaning.

Your turn

Copy 好看 once. Keep both characters full-sized instead of squeezing 看.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.10 Retrieval 1 — look, see, or good-looking?

Say **look**, **see**, and **good-looking** in that order.

Your turn

Hear the three meanings in mixed order. Say each Mandarin answer, read its unpointed card, then write it. Check the neighbour of 看 before deciding the whole meaning.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.11 Hear *shū* — book

Say **look**, **see**, and **good-looking** in Mandarin.

What to know first*shū* — **book**

Hold one level first tone. Do not add *kàn* yet; this step is only the object, **book**. Its four-stroke written form waits until the next lesson.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.12 书 — two folds, upright, dot

Say **book** as *shū*, then write 看 once from memory.

Script — the shape

Write 书 in four strokes: a short horizontal that folds down, a second horizontal that folds and hooks, the long central upright, then the small dot at the upper right. Four strokes; three lifts.

Your turn

Trace 书 once. Say **fold, hooked fold, upright, dot**. Let the upright pass through the middle instead of leaning toward the dot.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 书, pinned stroke paths and medians.

18.13 书 — copy the compact route

Read 看见 and give its meaning. Then air-write **fold, hooked fold, upright, dot**.

Your turn

Copy 书 twice beside the model. On the second copy, pause before the upright and check that both folds leave a clear central route.

Your turn — Spaced Return

Hear **see** and write 看见 once without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 书, pinned stroke paths and medians.

18.14 书 — wait, then place the dot

Write 好看 from the meaning **good-looking**. Then look at 书 for five seconds and cover it.

Your turn

Say **fold, hooked fold, upright, dot**, then write 书 once without the model. Check only after the dot is in place.

Your turn — Spaced Return

Hear **good-looking** and write 好看 without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 书, pinned stroke paths and medians.

18.15 书 — the sound meets the shape

Say **book** in Mandarin.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

书 — *shū* — **book**

Hide the pinyin. Read 书, hold the level first tone, then give its meaning.

Your turn

Hear *shū*. Wait three seconds, then write 书 once without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.16 Hear *kànshū* — read a book

Say **look or watch**, then say **book**.

What to know first

kànshū — **read a book; read books**

Let *kàn* fall and keep *shū* level. Mandarin says **look-at** + **book** for the activity **read**. Keep the characters hidden for one more tiny step.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.17 看书 — look at a book, read

Say **read a book** as *kànshū*. Write 看 and 书 separately.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

看书 — *kànshū* — **read a book; read books**

Read the action first and its object second. No new character is hiding here: 看 + 书 gives the whole reading activity.

Your turn

Copy 看书 once. Keep the long upright in 书 centred after the denser 看.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.18 Retrieval 2 — the earlier three return

Say **read a book** in Mandarin, then put that card away.

Your turn

Without looking back, write **look**, **see**, and **good-looking** from mixed meaning cards. Read each answer aloud only after all three are complete.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.19 Retrieval 1 — book or read a book?

Say **book**, then say **read a book**.

Your turn

Hear the two meanings in mixed order. Say each answer, read its unpointed card, then write it. Check whether 看 is present before deciding noun or activity.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.20 Listening score — five nearby meanings

Say **look** and **book** in Mandarin.

Your turn

Keep the page covered. Hear all five Mandarin forms in mixed order and give each meaning. Then reverse the cards and say all five Mandarin forms. Score listening and speaking separately out of five.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.21 Reading score — no pinyin

Read 看 and 书 without saying their pinyin first.

Your turn

Shuffle five unpointed cards: 好看, 书, 看见, 看书, 看. Read each cold and give its meaning. Score one point per form before any pinyin help.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.22 Writing score — sound to Hanzi, no model

Write 看 and 书 from their spoken syllables. Check only after both are complete.

Your turn

Hear the five meanings in mixed order and write all five forms without a model. Score each whole form first. Then repair only the first missed character or ordering choice.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

18.23 Payoff — looking and reading

Write 看 and 书 without a model, then name each aloud.

Your turn

1. **Listening, /5:** hear all five forms in mixed order and choose each meaning.
2. **Speaking, /5:** produce all five from meaning cards, with tones audible.

3. **Reading, /5:** read 看书, 好看, 书, 看见, 看 cold, without pinyin.
4. **Writing, /5:** hear all five meanings and write each form without a model.

Pass each skill separately. Repair only a missed form in the missed skill, then retry that column without cancelling the other three scores.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

Chapter 19

Asking

Modes: 🗣️ voice (12) 👁️ eyes (1) ✍️ pen (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 16 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can understand, say, read and write 吗, 你好吗, 是吗 and 好不好, turn any statement I already own into a yes-or-no question by either of Mandarin's two patterns, and score listening, speaking, reading and writing separately.

Before this chapter the track could greet, name, count to five and say what it read, and could not ask a yes-or-no question about any of it. One character closes that and does more than its own weight: 吗 goes on the end of a finished sentence and changes nothing else, so every statement already taught becomes a question. The second pattern costs no character at all – it is 不, held since the negation lesson, placed between two copies of a word.

19.1 Hear *ma* — the syllable that asks

Say **look**, **book**, and **read a book** in Mandarin. Name your four scores from the looking-and-reading payoff, and which of the four was lowest.

What to know first

ma — the question particle

Say it light, short and flat. It carries **no tone**, which makes it the first syllable in this book with none — every earlier one has been first, second, third or fourth. Give it none at all, and no stress either.

It also carries **no meaning** on its own. There is nothing to translate. What it does is turn the sentence in front of it into a question, and it does that without moving a single other word.

Hear *kàn shū* and then *kàn shū ma*. The words are identical and in the same order; only the light syllable at the end is new, and only the second one is asking.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.2 吗 — the mouth, then the horse

Say the neutral question syllable. Then write 口 in three strokes, and write 书 once from memory.

Script — the shape

Write 吗 in six strokes, left part first and complete:

- 口 on the left, small and lifted toward the top: the left vertical, then the horizontal that turns down the right side without lifting, then the closing bottom bar. Three strokes, as you already write it.
- 马 on the right, which supplies only the sound: a horizontal that turns down, then a long stroke that turns twice and hooks, then one wide horizontal across the whole right side. Three strokes.

Six strokes, five lifts. The 口 shrinks to about a third of the square and sits high; the wide final horizontal is the widest thing in the character and runs almost to the right edge.

The left half is doing real work even though it is not saying anything: 口 means *mouth*, and it marks 吗 as one of a family of characters that exist only to be spoken.

Your turn

Trace 吗 once. Say **mouth, mouth, mouth — turn, turn-and-hook, long bar**. Finish the whole 口 before starting the right half, and keep it small.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 吗, pinned stroke paths and medians.

19.3 吗 — copy it, and keep the mouth small

Read 看书 and give its meaning. Then air-write **mouth, mouth, mouth — turn, turn-and-hook, long bar**. Say **see** and **primary school**, and write 看见.

Your turn

Copy 吗 twice beside the model. On the second copy, stop after the third stroke and check two things before going on: the □ fills about a third of the width, and its bottom sits above the middle of the square.

Your turn — Spaced Return

Hear **read a book** and write 看书 once without a model.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 吗, pinned stroke paths and medians.

19.4 吗 — wait, then write the bar

Say the neutral question syllable, then write 书 once from memory.

Your turn

Look at 吗 for five seconds. Cover it, wait five more, then write it once. Uncover and check the order: all three strokes of □ before anything on the right.

Most characters give you a meaning to hang the shape on. This one does not — it means nothing by itself — so the route is all you have, and that is why it gets its own delay.

Before you move on

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 吗, pinned stroke paths and medians.

19.5 吗 — the sound meets the shape

Say the neutral question syllable. Then say **look** and **read a book**. Say **good-looking** and **primary-school pupil**, write 小, and recall your four looking-and-reading scores.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

吗 — *ma* — the question particle

Hide the pinyin. Read 吗, give it no tone at all, and say what it does rather than what it means.

Grammar lens — one character, every statement

Put 吗 at the **end** of a statement and the statement becomes a yes-or-no question. Nothing else changes:

- 你看书 — *nǐ kàn shū* — you read books.
- 你看书吗 — *nǐ kàn shū ma* — **do** you read books?

Same words. Same order. One character added at the end.

That is worth stopping on, because it is not how English works:

English moves words about and borrows a helper verb — *you read* becomes *do you read* — and Mandarin does neither. Every statement you can already make is now also a question you can ask, and there are no new words to learn to ask any of them.

Chinese closes both of those lines with a mark of its own — a small hollow circle for the statement and a question mark for the question. Neither mark is taught yet, so neither is printed here.

Your turn

Hear *ma*. Wait three seconds, then write 吗 once without a model. Then take any sentence you own and put 吗 on the end of it.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.6 Hear *nǐ hǎo ma* — how are you

Say **hello**. Then say the neutral syllable that turns a statement into a question.

What to know first

nǐ hǎo ma — **how are you?**

The very first thing this book taught you, with the very newest thing on the end of it. No new word arrives here at all.

Two third tones in a row still slide the first one up, exactly as they do in *nǐ hǎo* on its own — the light *ma* on the end changes nothing about that.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.7 你好吗 — the greeting, asked

Say **how are you**. Then write 你 and 好. Write 好看 too, and say what the 好 is doing in it.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

你好吗 — *nǐ hǎo ma* — **how are you?**

Read the three known shapes from left to right: 你, 好, and the new 吗 on the end. Every one of them is a character you have already written. That is the whole of what 吗 buys you. The book has been able to write 你好 since its first page and has never once been able to ask anything. One character, six strokes, and the greeting turns into a question.

Your turn

Copy 你好吗 once. Keep the three characters the same size. 吗 is not written smaller for meaning nothing.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.8 Retrieval 1 — greeting, or question?

Say **hello**, then **how are you**, and name the difference between them. Then say **book**, and recall your four scores from the primary-school payoff.

Your turn

Hear the two meanings in mixed order. Say each Mandarin answer, read its unpointed card, then write it. Look at the last character before deciding whether you were greeted or asked.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.9 Hear *shì ma* — is that so?

Say **to be**, then say **how are you**.

What to know first

shì ma — **is that so?** really?

Two syllables: the verb **to be**, falling hard, then the light question syllable. Nothing else.

This is the move you make when somebody tells you something and you want to show you heard it and to invite them to go on. English spends a whole phrase on it — *is that so, really, oh yes?* — and Mandarin spends two syllables, one of which you learned yesterday.

Say it with the voice going **down** on *shì* and staying light on *ma*. Said flat it checks a fact; said with the fall exaggerated it registers surprise.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.10 是吗 — checking what you were told

Say **is that so**. Then write 是, finishing 日 before the lower body. Write 书 and 中 as well.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

是吗 — *shì ma* — **is that so? really?**

Two known shapes, in the order you hear them: the nine-stroke 是, then the six-stroke 吗.

It is the shortest sentence in the book and it is a complete turn in a conversation. Somebody says something; you say 是吗; they keep going. Nothing about it is a fixed phrase to memorise — it is the yes-or-no rule applied to a one-word sentence.

Your turn

Copy 是吗 once. Leave a clear boundary between the two characters, and keep 是 the wider of the pair.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.11 Hear *hǎo bu hǎo* — the question with the answer inside it

Say **good**, say **not**, and say **is that so**.

What to know first

hǎo bu hǎo — **is it good? all right?**

Three syllables and no new word in any of them: **good, not, good**.

This is Mandarin's **second** way of asking a yes-or-no question, and it is completely unlike the first. Where *ma* adds a syllable that means nothing, this one says the word, then denies it, then says it again — and hands the listener both possible answers so they can pick one.

The **bu** in the middle goes light and toneless when it is caught between two copies of the same word. Say *hǎo-bu-hǎo* with the stress on the first and last and the middle syllable almost swallowed.

Both questions ask the same thing. *ma* is the neutral one; this one presses a little harder for a decision, which is why it is the one you hear at the end of a suggestion.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.12 好不好 — the question that needed no new character

Say **is it good**. Then write 好 and 不, keeping all four strokes of 不 separate. Say **secondary school**.

Grammar lens — say it, deny it, say it again

好不好 — *hǎo bu hǎo* — is it good? all right?

Three known shapes, and the pattern behind them works on anything:

- 是不是 — *shì bu shì* — is it, or isn't it?
- 看不看 — *kàn bu kàn* — will you look, or won't you?

Take any word that can be denied, put 不 in the middle, and repeat it. That is the whole rule, and it needs no new character because you have had 不 since the negation lesson.

Mandarin now gives you **two** ways to ask a yes-or-no question, and this book hands you both in this one chapter:

- 看书吗 — the light syllable on the end
- 看不看书 — the word, denied, and said again

They mean the same thing. Neither moves a word, and neither borrows a helper verb the way English does. Both would be written with a question mark of Chinese's own at the end. That mark is not taught yet, so it is left off here.

Your turn

Copy 好不好 once. Then build one more of your own: take a word you can write, put 不 in the middle, and write it again.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.13 Retrieval 2 — which question was that?

Say **how are you**, **is that so**, and **is it good**, in that order. Then say **read a book** and write 中学.

Your turn

Hear the three meanings in mixed order. Say each Mandarin answer, read its unpointed card, then write it. Before you write, decide which of the two question patterns it uses — the light syllable on the end, or the word denied in the middle.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.14 Listening score — catch the question

Say the light syllable that turns a statement into a question, and say where it goes. Then read 看书 and 看见 aloud.

Your turn

No cards and no writing. Hear each of the three, six times over in mixed order, and say the English meaning aloud before the next one starts.

Score listening on its own. A miss here is not a reading miss and not a writing miss, and it is repaired by hearing the item again rather than by looking at it.

The light *ma* is the thing most often missed, because it is short, toneless and last. If you lose one, that is almost certainly the one.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.15 Reading score — no pinyin on the card

Write 吗 once from memory, then 是. Then say **secondary-school pupil**.

Your turn

Read the three cards cold. No pinyin is printed on any of them. For each one, say it aloud and then give the English.

Score reading on its own. Reading and hearing fail differently here: by ear the light *ma* is easy to lose, and on the page it is the most visible thing in the sentence because it is a whole character. The one you miss reading is more likely to be 好不好, where nothing is added and the clue is a repetition.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

19.16 Payoff — the book can ask

Say **hello**, **to be**, **good**, **not**, and the light question syllable. Then write 中学生.

Your turn

Four passes over the same four items, scored separately:

- **Listening.** Hear each of the four and give its English.
- **Speaking.** Be given the English and say the Mandarin, tones and all.

- **Reading.** Read four unpointed cards cold and give their meanings.
- **Writing.** Hear each one and write it with no model.

Record four numbers, not one. A reader who hears all four and writes none has a writing problem, and averaging the two hides it.

What you've built

Before this chapter the book had no way to ask a yes-or-no question at all. It could greet, name, count to five, say what it saw and say what it read, and it could not ask about any of it.

One character closed that, and it did more than its own weight: every statement this book has taught you is now also a question, because 吗 goes on the end of a finished sentence and changes nothing else. The second pattern, 好不好, needed no new character whatsoever — it is 不, which you have had for chapters, put between two copies of a word.

Before you move on

Source: Official HSK 3.0 syllabus, Level 1 vocabulary.

Chapter 20

Six to Ten, and the Character That Was Already Here

Modes:  voice (6)  pen (5)  Hands-free start: none of the 11 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say, hear, read and write the Mandarin numbers one to ten with their tones, and write the five characters this chapter adds.

Five characters and twelve strokes finish a run the book abandoned at five seventeen chapters earlier – with 八 set against 人, and + finally taught on its own after thirteen chapters inside 早.

20.1 六 — four strokes again, for six this time

Write 五. How many strokes, and how many does it mean?

Script — a dot, a bar, two legs

六

Four strokes. For six. 五 had four for five; 六 has four for six. Whatever was left of the counting trick after chapter 3 is now gone for good.

The four strokes, in order:

1. the short **diǎn** dot at the top centre, down and to the right
2. the long **héng** horizontal beneath it, left to right

3. the left leg, a **piě** falling to the lower left
4. the right leg, a **nà** falling to the lower right

Top before bottom, then left before right — the two rules that have ordered every character in this book.

Hold on to strokes 3 and 4. On their own, without the dot and the bar, they are the character for **eight**, and you will write them again in two lessons.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 六 — dot, bar, left leg, right leg
- *Cover:* write it again from memory

Before you move on

Sources: Hanzi Writer Data 六; Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.2 六 — six, and the run starts again

Write 六, then count aloud to five.

The sounds and tones in this word

六 *liù* means **six**.

liù is **fourth tone** — the sharp fall, the same shape as *sì*, four. Say them together and only the mouth changes: **sì, liù**.

The vowel is worth a moment. Pinyin writes *iu*, and what you say is closer to *ioū*: there is a faint **o** in the middle that the spelling does not print.

What you've built — the run starts again

This book taught 一 二 三 四 五 in chapter 3 and then stopped. For seventeen chapters it could name a family, a school and a greeting and could not count to six — could not give an age, a price, a floor or a date. 六 is where that starts being paid back.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **sì, liù** — one fall, twice
- **yī èr sān sì wǔ liù** — the run, at speed

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.3 七 — two strokes, for seven

Write 七 and say how many strokes it has.

Script — the second stroke does the work

七

Two strokes. For seven. Six had four, seven has two — the stroke count is not merely useless now, it is running backwards.

The two strokes:

1. the **héng** horizontal, left to right, rising a little as it goes
2. the **shùwāngōu**: start high on the right, descend, bend along the foot to the right, and hook upward at the end

That second stroke is one continuous movement with two turns in it. Do not lift in the middle of it — a lift is what makes it two strokes instead of one, and seven would then be three.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 七 — the bar, then the turning stroke, unbroken
- *Count:* two strokes, not three

Before you move on

Sources: Hanzi Writer Data 七; Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.4 七 — seven

Write 七, then say six.

The sounds and tones in this word

七 *qī* means **seven**.

qī is **first tone**, the high level one — the same shape as *yī*, one. Say them in a row and hold the pitch flat across both: **yī, qī**.

The **q** is the piece to work on, because English has no letter for it. Put the tongue where it goes for **y** in *yes*, then release the air the way you do for **ch**. It is not the *k* of *queen* and it is not an English *ch*; it is the tongue of one and the release of the other.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **yī, qī** — two high level tones
- **wǔ liù qī** — dip, fall, level

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.5 八 — a character you have already written twice

Write 七, then write 六 and put a finger on its two legs.

Script — the gap is the character

八

Two strokes. For eight.

1. the left leg, a **piě** falling to the lower left
2. lift, then the right leg, a **nà** falling to the lower right

You wrote both of them in 六 two lessons ago, under the dot and the bar. Take the dot and the bar away and what is left is eight.

And one more comparison, because it is the sharpest in the whole book: 人, *rén*, “person”, is these same two strokes **joined at the top**. 八 is the same two strokes **parted**. The gap is the entire difference between a person and the number eight — which is why the first stroke of 八 begins below where 人’s does, and why the two must never be allowed to touch.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 八 — left leg, lift, right leg, apart at the top
- *Contrast:* write 人 beside it and mark where they meet

Before you move on

Sources: Hanzi Writer Data 八; Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.6 八 — eight, and why it costs more

Write 八, then say seven.

The sounds and tones in this word

八 *bā* means **eight**.

bā is **first tone**, high and level, like *qī*. The **b** is unaspirated: no puff of air, closer to an English *p* in *spin* than the *b* of *bin*.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

bā sounds close to *fā*, the first syllable of a word meaning to prosper or come into wealth. That resemblance is why eight is the number people pay extra for: on a car number plate, in a phone number, in the price of a flat on the eighth floor. The Beijing Olympics opened at eight seconds past eight on the eighth day of the eighth month.

A number can carry that much only in a language where numbers sound like other words, and this is the clearest case of it a beginner will meet.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- qī, bā — two level tones
- liù qī bā — fall, level, level

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.7 九 — two strokes again

Write 八 and 七. How many strokes between them? Say why eight is the number people pay extra for.

Script — a fall and a turn

九

Two strokes. For nine.

1. a long piě, falling from the upper right all the way to the lower left
2. lift, then the **héngzhéwāngōu**: cross the first stroke to the right, turn downward, and hook back to the left at the foot

Seven, eight and nine are two strokes each. **The last three single digits are the three quickest characters in this book to write**, and the three largest numbers you have. Whatever intuition said that bigger numbers need more ink is finished.

Your turn

Write these out:

- 九 — the long fall, then the crossing turn with its hook
- 七 八 九 in a row — six strokes for three numbers

Before you move on

Sources: Hanzi Writer Data 九; Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.8 九 — nine

Write 九, then say eight.

The sounds and tones in this word

九 *jiǔ* means **nine**.

jiǔ is **third tone**, the low dip — so it joins *nǐ*, *hǎo* and *wǔ*. Say all four in a row and let the pitch stay low and creaky across every one. The **j** is the unaspirated partner of the **q** in *qī*: same tongue position, no puff of air. Say **qī jiǔ** and the only difference is the breath. Keep the dip in mind. Two third tones in a row do not both dip — the first one lifts — and nine is about to give this book its first pair of them.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **nǐ hǎo wǔ jiǔ** — four dips
- **qī jiǔ** — the same tongue, one with breath and one without
- **qī bā jiǔ**

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.9 十 — the character that was already here

Write 早, *zǎo*, morning. Say what sits under the sun in it.

Script — a bar and a post

+

Two strokes. For ten.

1. the **héng** horizontal, left to right
2. lift, then the **shù** vertical, top to bottom, crossing it at the centre

You have written this before. It is the lower half of 早 — and the morning lesson said, in as many words, that on its own this piece is the character for ten, and then went on to something else. It has been sitting on the page for thirteen chapters waiting for a number to hang on.

Set it against 一, one: the same horizontal, with a post through it.

Your turn

Write these out:

- 十 — bar first, then post
- 早 and point at the 十 inside it

Before you move on

Sources: Hanzi Writer Data 十; Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.10 十 — ten

Write 十, then say nine.

The sounds and tones in this word

十 *shí* means **ten**.

shí is **second tone**, the rise — the pitch starts in the middle and goes up, as if asking. It is the first number in the whole run of ten to use it. The **sh** curls the tongue back, further than an English *sh*. Keep the tip high and behind the ridge.

Say the whole run once: **yī èr sān sì wǔ liù qī bā jiǔ shí**. Level, fall, level, fall, dip, fall, level, level, dip, rise.

What you've built — the last of the ten

Ten is not simply the tenth word. It is the last one this book needs before **every number up to ninety-nine falls out of the ten it already has** — and the next chapter spends it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- **bā jiǔ shí** — level, dip, rise
- the whole run, one to ten, at speed

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

20.11 Payoff — one to ten

Say ten, then say why eight costs more.

Your turn

1. Count aloud one to ten, then ten to one.
2. Hear all ten named singly and out of order, and say each.
3. Read the ten characters printed shuffled — 九 三 十 六 一 八 四 七 二 五 — and say each with its tone.
4. Write the five new ones from dictation: 六 七 八 九 十.
5. Say the tone of each of the ten in order. Only one of them rises.
6. Say what 八 and 人 differ by, and what sits inside 早.

Five new characters cost **twelve strokes between them** — four, two, two, two and two. The single hardest thing in this chapter was not the writing; it was that the numbers had been left at five for seventeen chapters.

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 21

Ten Words, Ninety-Nine Numbers

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ✎ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: first 2 of 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can build any number from eleven to ninety-nine out of the ten words I already have, say a hundred, and read a price written in Arabic numerals.

One rule of order turns ten words into ninety-nine numbers, 一百 is where —'s tone finally moves, and the digits chapter says which of 5 and 五 a price tag actually prints.

21.1 十一 — eleven, and the teens in one line

Count one to ten, then say ten on its own.

You'll want to know first — ten, then one

十一 — shíyī — eleven

Ten, then one. That is all of it.

And it does not stop at eleven. 十五 is shíwǔ, ten-five, fifteen. 十九 is shíjiǔ, ten-nine, nineteen. English has *eleven, twelve, thirteen* — three separate shapes before the pattern starts — and German, Russian and Urdu each have their own nine irregular words to memorise here.

Mandarin has none. The teens are the numbers you already have, in the order you already say them. Nine numbers, no new vocabulary, no new characters, and nothing to learn but the order.

Your turn

- *Say it:* **shíyī** — eleven
- *Build:* **shí** + **sān** → **shísān**, thirteen
- *Build:* **shí** + **bā** → **shíbā**, eighteen
- *Run through:* eleven to nineteen, straight through

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

21.2 二十 — twenty, and ninety-nine numbers from ten words

Say **shíyī**, and build seventeen.

You'll want to know first — turn the pair round

二十 — *èrshí* — **twenty**

十一 is ten-one, eleven. 二十 is two-ten, twenty. The same two words in the other order, and the order is the entire difference.

That gives every ten: 三十 thirty, 四十 forty, 九十 ninety. Put a unit on the end of one and you have everything between: 二十一, *èrshíyī*, twenty-one; 九十九, ninety-nine.

Ten words reach ninety-nine. English needs *eleven*, *twelve* and *thirteen* before its own pattern begins, and *twenty*, *thirty* and *fifty* are three more shapes again. Mandarin needs none of them.

The sounds and tones in this word

九十九, ninety-nine, is the drill this book has been waiting for. *jiǔ* is third tone and so is the *jiǔ* at the end, and the rule you met in chapter 1 applies: a third tone before another third tone lifts and becomes a rise.

Say it: **jiú-shí-jiǔ**. The first nine rises, the last one dips.

Your turn

- *Say it:* èrshí — twenty
- *Build:* sān + shí → sānshí, thirty
- *Build:* wǔ + shí + liù → wǔshíliù, fifty-six
- *Say it:* jiùshíjiǔ — ninety-nine, with the first dip lifted

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

21.3 百 — a hundred, on a box you have built before

Write 四 and 一.

Script — six strokes, five of them familiar

百

Six strokes. For a hundred.

1. the top **héng** horizontal, left to right
2. lift, then the short **piě** below it, falling to the left
3. lift, then the **shù** vertical down the left side of the box
4. lift, then the **héngzhé**: across the top of the box and down its right side
5. lift, then the inner **héng** horizontal
6. lift, then the bottom **héng**, closing the box

Strokes 3 to 6 are the box of 四, built in the same order: the left side, then the top-and-right turn, then the inside, then the floor. **Outside before inside, and the box closes last** — the rule you used for 四 and 口.

Only strokes 1 and 2 are new, and stroke 1 is 一.

Your turn

Write these out:

- 百 — bar, short fall, then the box in 四's order
- 四 beside it and mark the four strokes they share

Before you move on

Sources: Hanzi Writer Data 百; Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

21.4 一百 — a hundred, and 一 moves

Write 百, then say twenty.

The sounds and tones in this word

百 *bǎi* means **a hundred**, and it is almost always said with 一 in front of it: 一百, one hundred.

bǎi is **third tone**, the low dip, like *jiǔ* and *wǔ*.

The word, taken apart — what its characters are made of

Counting on its own, 一 is *yī*, high and level. In 一百 it is not: you say *yìbǎi*, with a fall.

一 shifts its tone depending on what follows, exactly as 不 does — the behaviour this book named in its first chapter for a different word. Before a first, second or third tone, 一 falls: *yìbǎi*. Before a fourth tone it rises instead.

So the number that sounds simplest in the run is the one that changes most, and a hundred is where a learner meets it first.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *yī* alone — level
- *Say it:* *yìbǎi* — falling, then dipping
- *Run through:* *shí, èrshí, yìbǎi* — ten, twenty, a hundred

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

21.5 5 and 五 — the same number, two registers

Say five, then say a hundred.

You'll want to know first — where each one is written

5 and 五 are both *wǔ*.

A reader who has spent this chapter learning 六 七 八 九 十 could still walk past a Chinese shop and read nothing on the price tag, because **a price is written in Arabic numerals**. So are dates, telephone numbers, bus numbers, floor numbers, addresses and the year.

The characters are not archaic. They are a different register, and both are current:

written with	where you meet it
5, 20, 100	prices, dates, phone numbers, addresses, anything counted
五, 二十, 一百	formal and legal text, cheque amounts, shop signs, set phrases, running prose

Both are read aloud **the same way** — you see **5** and you say *wǔ*. That is the useful part: the digits cost you nothing to learn and everything to ignore.

One convention worth carrying: on a bill or a cheque an amount is often written twice, once in digits and once in characters, because the characters are much harder to alter.

Your turn

- *Read it:* 5, 10, 20, 99 aloud as *wǔ*, *shí*, *èrshí*, *jiǔshíjiǔ*
- *Write it:* each of those four in characters as well
- *Say it:* which of the two a price tag uses, and which a cheque uses

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

21.6 Payoff — ninety-nine numbers, and the price tag

Count one to ten, then say which of 五 and 𠫪 a price tag uses.

Your turn

1. **Build, do not recall.** Say twelve, seventeen, thirty, forty-five, sixty-eight and eighty-one, from the ten words alone.
2. Say **jiúshíjiǔ**, ninety-nine, with the first dip lifted.
3. Say **yìbǎi**, and say what happens to 一 in front of it.
4. Read **8, 15, 30, 99** and **100** off a page and say each aloud.
5. Write 十一, 二十 and 一百 in characters.
6. Give a floor number, an age and a price, each as a bare number.

Count what this cost: **five characters and one rule of order** — ten before a unit multiplies nothing, ten after a unit multiplies it. That order is worth more than every word in this chapter put together.

What is still out of reach: *yìqiān*, a thousand, and everything above it — and the measure word a Chinese number needs before an actual noun, which is a chapter of its own.

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

21.7 Close the numeral slice

Count one to ten, then say why eight costs more.

Your turn

The six new characters, alone, from spoken cues and with no number around them: 六 七 八 九 十 百.

Then put each back to work once.

1. Write the five single digits and say the stroke count of each. Four, two, two, two, two — twelve strokes for five numbers.
2. Write 百 and mark the four strokes it shares with 四.
3. Write 早 and mark the 十 inside it.
4. Write 人 and 八 side by side and say what separates them.
5. Build six numbers between eleven and ninety-nine from the ten words.
6. Read a price in digits and say it aloud in words.

Say what the whole slice cost the hand: **six characters, fourteen strokes**, and one rule about the order of two of them.

Before you move on

Source: Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart

Chapter 22

The Grammar That Is Not There

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can state the four things Mandarin does not do — no verb endings, no agreement, no article, no separate nationality word — and name where somebody is from.

Four facts about Mandarin's shape and one join, and the whole chapter adds not a single character: three of the four are things a reader must stop doing, and the fourth puts 中国 and 人 together for the first time.

22.1 看 — the verb that never changes

A new chapter, and it teaches no new character at all. Five retrievals first.

- *Recall:* say *liù qī bā jiǔ shí bǎi* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *bǎi* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *zì — hàn zì — hàn yǔ — zhōng wén — zhōng guó* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *kàn* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall:* say *yǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *hàn yǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

You'll want to know: there is nothing to conjugate

A Mandarin verb has exactly one form. It never changes — not for who is doing it, not for how many of them there are, and not for when.

You have been given 看 *kàn*, “to look”, and you have used it in exactly one shape. That was not the lesson being brief. That is the whole verb.

我看书	<i>wǒ kàn shū</i> — I read
你看书	<i>nǐ kàn shū</i> — you read
人看书	<i>rén kàn shū</i> — people read

The verb is 看 three times. Nothing has been added, dropped or swapped.

This is worth stating out loud because of what a reader coming from English or Spanish does otherwise: they wait for the ending, decide the book has not reached it yet, and go on quietly expecting one. Spanish has *hablo, hablas, habla, hablamos, habláis, hablan*. English has three forms and an irregular verb for every occasion. **Mandarin has one shape and no exceptions.**

Every verb in this book behaves this way — 看, 是, 上学 — and so will every verb in every chapter after it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *wǒ kàn shū, nǐ kàn shū, rén kàn shū* — one verb, three sentences
- 我是学生 / 你是学生 — 是 does not move either

Before you move on

How many forms does a Mandarin verb have? (**One.**) What changes when the person changes? (**Nothing.**) And what should you stop waiting for? (**The ending** — there is not one.)

22.2 我是 — nothing agrees with anything

One lesson back, and the same fact from the other end.

- *Recall*: say *kàn* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *yìbǎi* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *kàn* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *kànjiàn* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *yǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *hànzì* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

You'll want to know: the subject changes nothing

The subject of a Mandarin sentence has no effect on the verb whatsoever.

The last lesson said a verb has one form. This says the other half: nothing about the subject reaches it.

我是学生 *wǒ shì xuésheng* — I am a student. 你是学生 *nǐ shì xuésheng* — you are a student. 人是学生 *rén shì xuésheng* — people are students.

是 *shì* is the same 是 in all three. An English speaker has to pick *am*, *are* or *is*; a Spanish speaker has to pick *soy*, *eres*, *es*, *somos*, *sois* or *son*. You pick 是.

Grammar Lens: and nothing after the verb agrees either

The thing that comes AFTER 是 does not change either.

我是大学生 — I am a university student. 人是大学生 — people are university students.

大学生 is one word with one shape whether it names one person or a hundred. Spanish would need *estudiante* against *estudiantes*, and would then need the adjective to follow suit. Mandarin marks none of it.

So the whole of agreement, in Mandarin, is a thing you must not do. That is an unusual kind of lesson: what a Spanish learner

spends months getting right, a Mandarin learner has to be told to stop attempting. If you find yourself wondering which form to use, the answer is that there is only one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 我是学生 — 你是学生 — 人是学生
- 我是大学生 — 人是大学生 — one shape, one and many

Before you move on

What does the subject do to the verb? (**Nothing**.) What does a plural subject do to the noun after 是? (**Nothing** — 大学生 has one shape.) So how much agreement is there in Mandarin? (**None at all**.)

22.3 书 — a book, the book, books

Two lessons in, and this one is about a word you have had since the reading chapter.

- *Recall*: say *wǒ shì* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *wǔ* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *kànjàn* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *hǎokàn* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *yǒu* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *hàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

You'll want to know: Mandarin has no article

书 *shū* means **a book**, **the book**, and **books**. Mandarin has no word for *a* and no word for *the*, and a bare noun says nothing about how many there are.

Which of the three it means is settled by what is going on around it, and by nothing in the word itself.

我看书 — I read *a* book. / I read *the* book. / I read books.

All three are the same sentence. If you need to say **one** book you can count it — that takes a measure word, which arrives in two chapters. If you need to say **this** book you can point at it, which needs a word this book has not taught yet. What you never need is an article, because there is not one to leave out.

This is the trap for an English or Spanish speaker, and it runs both ways. Arriving, they hunt for the missing *the* and try to supply it from their own language. Leaving, they drop English articles: *I read book*. Neither is a vocabulary problem. Mandarin does not mark the distinction here at all, and 书 on its own is complete.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 我看书 — and mean it three ways
- 书 — a book, the book, books

Before you move on

What does 书 mean? (**A book, the book, and books** — all three.) How does Mandarin mark which one? (**It does not.**) What should an English speaker stop looking for? (**The article** — there is none.)

22.4 中国人 — where somebody is from

The fourth lesson of a chapter that has added no character at all.

- *Recall*: say *shū* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *shíyī èrshí jiúshíjiǔ yìbǎi* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *hǎokàn* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shū* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *hànyǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *hànzì* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

You'll want to know: country plus 人

中国人 *Zhōngguó rén* — a Chinese person.

Read it again and count what is new. 中国 *Zhōngguó*, China, was taught in the country chapter. 人 *rén*, person, was the first character this book ever asked you to write. **Nothing here is new. The lesson is the join.**

我是中国人 *wǒ shì Zhōngguó rén* — I am Chinese. 你是中国人吗
nǐ shì Zhōngguó rén ma — are you Chinese?

That second sentence uses 吗 from the asking chapter, and it is one of the two or three questions a beginner is asked most often.

Grammar Lens: the rule, and how far it reaches

country + 人 = a person from that country.

That is the whole pattern, and it works on every country name without exception. Mandarin has no separate set of nationality words the way English has *China* → *Chinese*, *Spain* → *Spanish*, *France* → *French*, each with its own shape to learn. It has one noun and one suffix.

The same trick makes the language name, with 语 or 文 instead of 人 — and you already hold both: 汉语 and 中文 were taught in the language chapters. So one country word gives you the place, the people and the language.

Notice what Mandarin does **not** do here. It does not capitalise 中国人, because it has no capitals at all. It does not agree the word with

anything. And it does not distinguish a *Chinese person* from *Chinese people*: 中国人 is both.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 中国人 — *Zhōngguó rén*
- 我是中国人
- 你是中国人吗

Before you move on

How do you say “a Chinese person”? (中国人.) How many new characters did that take? (**None** — 中国 and 人 were both already yours.) What is the rule? (**Country plus 人**.)

22.5 中国人 — 书 — 看: the chapter with no new character

The chapter closes. Five retrievals, then the four skills.

- *Recall*: say *Zhōngguó rén* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *liù qī bā jiǔ shí bǎi* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shū* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *kànshū* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zì* — *hànzì* — *hànyǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *zì* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

What you've built — four facts, no new strokes

A character costs this book a great deal: a stroke record checked against a source, a writing lesson, a reading lesson, and a regeneration of the font the book prints with. **This chapter cost none of that,** and it is worth saying what it bought.

1. **A verb has one form.** 我看书, 你看书, 人看书.
2. **Nothing agrees.** Not the verb with its subject, not what follows 是 with how many there are.
3. **There is no article.** 书 is a book, the book, and books.
4. **Country + 人 names a people.** 我是中国人

Three of those four are things you must *stop* doing rather than start, which is why no lesson had ever said them: an absence leaves no word to teach. The fourth is a join between two things the book had already given you and never let meet.

Listen. *Wǒ shì Zhōngguó rén. Nǐ ne — nǐ shì Zhōngguó rén ma?*

Speak. Say what you are, and ask the same question back with 吗.

Read. 我是中国人 — 你是中国人吗

Write. 中国人 — every stroke of it is one you have written before.

Your turn

- *Say it:* 我是中国人
- *Say it:* 你是中国人吗
- *Write it:* 中国人

Before you move on

Name the four facts this chapter taught. (**One verb form; no agreement; no article; country plus 人.**) How many characters did it add? (**None.**) And which of the four is a thing to start doing rather than stop? (**Country plus 人.**)

Chapter 23

De — The Hinge

Modes:  voice (3)  eyes (1)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say whose something is, put a whole description in front of the noun it describes, and open a sentence with its topic.

One character, eight strokes and no tone, doing three jobs — and the third of them, the topic slot, costs no character at all because it is an order rather than a word.

23.1 的 — eight strokes for the commonest character there is

A new chapter. Six retrievals, then the pen.

- *Recall:* say *Zhōngguó rén* — *shū* — *kàn* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *kàn* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *kànshū* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *kàn* — *kànjiàn* — *hǎokàn* — *shū* — *kànshū* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall:* say *zì* — *hànzì* — *hànyǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more

- *Recall:* say *zhōngxué* — *zhōngxuésheng* — *tóngxué* — *shàngxué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — a box on the left, a hook on the right

的

Eight strokes, in two halves. The left half is 白 *bái*, “white”; the right half is 勺 *sháo*, a ladle. Finish the whole left half before the right one starts — the rule every two-part character in this book has followed.

The left half, 白, five strokes:

1. a short **piě** falling to the left, at the top
2. the **shù** down the left side of the box
3. the **héngzhé** across the top and down the right side, without lifting
4. the **héng** inside the box
5. the **héng** that closes its floor

That box is built exactly as 百’s was, and for the same reason: **outside before inside, and the floor last.**

The right half, 勺, three strokes:

1. a **piě** falling to the left from the top
2. a long **héngzhégōu** down the right side, hooking left at the base
3. a single **diǎn** dot, placed last, inside the enclosure

The dot goes in last. Enclose, then fill. That is why it is stroke eight and not stroke six.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 的 — 白 first, all five, then 勺’s three
- *Cover:* write it again from memory, and check the dot came last

Before you move on

How many strokes does 的 have, and how do they split? (**Eight** — five for 白, three for 勺.) Which stroke is the dot? (**The last one** — enclose, then fill.) Which character built its box the same way? (百.)
Source: Hanzi Writer Data 的, pinned stroke paths and medians.

23.2 的 — whose it is

One lesson back, and the character is already under your pen.

- *Recall*: say *de* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *wǒ shì* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *ma* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zhōngwén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *shàngxué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

The sounds and tones in this word

的 is said **de** — and that is the whole of it. **No tone at all.**

It is the third toneless word in this book, after 吗 and the 上 of 早上, and like them it is said light, short and low, leaning on the word in front of it. Do not give it a falling tone because it looks like a full character. It is a hinge, not a word.

Grammar Lens: owner + 的 + owned

owner + 的 + the thing owned.

我的书 *wǒ de shū* — my book 我的名字 *wǒ de míngzi* —
my name 你的书 *nǐ de shū* — your book

That is the entire Mandarin possessive. Look at what is NOT there:

- **No agreement.** 的 never changes for the owner, the thing, or how many.
- **No separate word for “mine”.** English needs *my* and *mine*; Spanish needs *mi*, *mío*, *mía*, *míos*, *mías*. Mandarin has 的.
- **No difference between one owner and several.** The same 的 does both.

You have had 我 since the chapter that taught you to say who you are, and it has had nothing to own until now.

One habit worth learning early: with family and with very close things, Mandarin **drops** 的 — a speaker says 我家, not 我的家. The closer the tie, the likelier the 的 falls away.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *wǒ de shū* — 我的书
- *wǒ de míngzi* — 我的名字
- *nǐ de shū* — 你的书

Before you move on

What tone does 的 carry? (**None**.) What is the order? (**Owner, 的, thing owned**.) And what does 的 do when the owner is plural? (**Nothing** — it never changes.)

23.3 看书的人 — the one who reads

One lesson back, and the same character doing a bigger job.

- *Recall*: say *de* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *shū* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *ma* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back

- *Recall*: say *nǐ hǎo ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *wén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *shàngxué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Grammar Lens: put the description in front

的 does not only join an owner to a thing. Put a whole clause in front of it and that clause describes the noun that follows.

看书的人 *kàn shū de rén* — the person **who reads books**
 看书的学生 — the student **who reads books** 我看的书 *wǒ kàn de shū* — the book **I read**

Read the Mandarin order against the English. English says *the person who reads books*: noun first, description trailing after it. Mandarin says *reads-books 的 person*: **description first, noun last, always.**

That is the single most important thing in this lesson, and it is not a word to learn — it is a direction to turn round. Everything that describes a noun in Mandarin goes in front of it, however long it gets, and 的 is the hinge that holds it there. English has one construction like this and it is short — *a well-read person* — and Mandarin uses that shape for all of them.

Notice that the 的 is the same 的 as the last lesson's, unchanged and toneless. Mandarin does not have one word for the possessive and another for the relative. It has this one hinge, and what goes in front of it decides which job it is doing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *kàn shū de rén* — 看书的人
- *wǒ kàn de shū* — 我看的书
- 看书的学生

Before you move on

Where does a Mandarin description go? (**In front of the noun**, always.) Which word holds it there? (的.) Is it a different 的 from 我的书? (**No** — one hinge, two jobs.)

23.4 汉语 — 我看书: topic first, comment after

Four in, and this one names the shape the whole language prefers.

- *Recall*: say *kàn shū de rén* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *Zhōngguó rén* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *nǐ hǎo ma* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shì ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *wén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *tóngxué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Grammar Lens: the topic comes first

Mandarin puts the thing being talked about first, and then says something about it. The first slot is the TOPIC, not necessarily the subject.

汉语 — 我看书 *Hànyǔ, wǒ kàn shū* — Chinese? I read it.
 书 — 我看 *shū, wǒ kàn* — Books, I read. 我 — 中国人
wǒ, Zhōngguó rén — Me, I'm Chinese.

(Chinese writes a comma at that seam. This book has not taught a single punctuation mark — its own inventory reports the column empty — so the seam is printed here as a dash rather than smuggled in.)

In each of those the first word is not doing the verb. It is the subject *under discussion*, and the rest of the sentence is the remark about it. English can do this and treats it as informal — *me, I'd rather walk; that book, I've read*. Mandarin does it constantly and treats it as

ordinary. It is why so much beginner Mandarin built on an English template sounds stiff: the learner keeps the doer in front when a Mandarin speaker would have put the topic there.

A useful consequence. Once the topic is set, everything afterwards can leave it out. A Mandarin speaker will not repeat 书 in the second half of *shū, wǒ kàn* — and will not supply a pronoun for it either. Where English needs *it*, Mandarin needs nothing, because the topic is still standing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 汉语 — 我看书
- 书 — 我看
- 我 — 中国人

Before you move on

What goes in the first slot of a Mandarin sentence? (**The topic** — what is being talked about.) Must it be the one doing the verb? (**No.**) What does the second half do about repeating it? (**Nothing** — it leaves it out.)

23.5 我的书 — 看书的人

The chapter closes on one character and the four skills.

- *Recall*: say *Hànyǔ, wǒ kàn shū* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *Zhōngguó rén — shū — kàn* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shì ma* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *hǎo bu hǎo* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance

- *Recall*: say *wén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *tóng* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

What you've built — the hinge

One character, eight strokes, no tone — and with it:

1. 我的书 — whose something is, with no agreement anywhere.
2. 看书的人 — a description standing in FRONT of what it describes.
3. 汉语 — 我看书 — a topic first, and a comment after it.

The third of those needed no character at all: it is an order, not a word. It is in this chapter because 的 is what makes the first slot worth filling.

Listen. *Wǒ de shū. Kàn shū de rén. Hànyǔ, wǒ kàn shū.*

Speak. Say whose the book is, then say who the reader is.

Read. 我的名字 — 看书的学生 — 书 — 我看

Write. 的 — 白 first, then 勺, and the dot last.

Your turn

- *Say it*: 我的书 — 我的名字 — 你的书
- *Say it*: 看书的人 — 看书的学生
- *Write it*: 的

Before you move on

Name the three jobs this chapter gave 的 and its slot. (**Possession; a description in front of its noun; and the topic that opens a sentence.**) Which one cost no character? (**The topic** — it is an order, not a word.)

Chapter 24

Have, and Count

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ✍ pen (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I have, say that there is something, and put a number against a noun with a measure word between them.

Nine strokes across two characters give the numerals something to count at last, and 个 is three strokes of which two are 人.

24.1 有 — six strokes, and a moon underneath

A new chapter, and its first character is a verb the book has gone twenty-three chapters without.

- *Recall:* say *wǒ de shū* — *kàn shū de rén* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *de* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *hǎo bu hǎo* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *ma* — *nǐ hǎo ma* — *shì ma* — *hǎo bu hǎo* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall:* say *zhōngwén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *tóngxué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — two strokes on top, 月 beneath

有

Six strokes. Two cross at the top; the remaining four build 月, the moon, underneath.

1. the **héng** across the top, left to right
2. the long **piě** from the top centre, falling to the lower left and running past everything below it

Horizontal before left-falling. You have written that order twice already, in 大 and in 六, and it decides these two.

Then 月:

1. the **shù** down the left side
2. the **héngzhégōu** across the top and down the right side, hooking left at the base — one stroke, two turns, no lift
3. the upper **héng** inside it
4. the lower **héng** inside it

Enclose, then fill: the two inner bars come after the walls, exactly as in 白 and 百 and 四.

One thing to watch. Stroke 2 is the longest in the character and it must reach the bottom-left corner, well past 月. A short one turns 有 into something that is not 有.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 有 — bar, long fall, then 月's four
- *Cover:* write it again, and check the long stroke reaches the corner

Before you move on

How many strokes does 有 have? (**Six.**) Which comes first, the horizontal or the falling stroke? (**The horizontal** — as in 大 and 六.) What sits underneath? (月, built walls-first.)

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 有, pinned stroke paths and medians.

24.2 有 — to have, and there is

One lesson back, and the character is already yours.

- *Recall*: say *yǒu* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *de* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *liù* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *liù* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zì* — *hànzì* — *hànyǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *xiǎo* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

The sounds and tones in this word

有 *yǒu* is **third tone** — the dip, low and creaky, the same shape as the 好 you have said since your first day and the 五 you count with. Say them in a row and only the mouth changes: **hǎo, wǔ, yǒu**.

我有书 *wǒ yǒu shū* — I have a book. 我有名字 — I have a name.

Grammar Lens: the same verb says there is

有 is also how Mandarin says **there is** and **there are**. It is one verb doing both jobs, and no extra word is needed for the second:

有人 *yǒu rén* — there is somebody. / somebody's here.
有中国人 — there are Chinese people here.

English needs *have* for the first job and *there is* for the second; Spanish needs *tener* and *hay*. Mandarin needs 有.

And now the exception that every Mandarin course states early, because it is the only one of its kind:

有 is the one verb 不 cannot negate.

不 has negated everything in this book so far — 不好, 不是, 不谢 — and it cannot negate this. The negative of 有 is *méi yǒu*, said with a

different negator altogether, whose character this book has not yet taught. Hold the rule now and the writing later: 不有 **is never** Mandarin.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *hǎo, wǔ, yǒu* — three dips
- 我有书 我有名字
- 有人

Before you move on

What tone is 有? (**Third**, the dip.) What are its two jobs? (**To have**, and **there is**.) Which negator does it refuse? (不 — 有 takes *méi* instead.)

24.3 个 — three strokes, and you already write two of them

Two lessons in, and this character is nearly free.

- *Recall*: say *yǒu* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *kàn shū de rén* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *qī* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *qī* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zhōngguó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *dà — dàjiā — xué — xuésheng — dàxué — dàxuésheng* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — 人, and a line under it

个

Three strokes, and the first two are a character you have written since the opening chapter.

1. the **piě**, falling from the peak to the lower left
2. the **nà**, falling from the same peak to the lower right
3. the **shù**, straight down from under the junction

Strokes 1 and 2 are 人 — the same pair, from the same peak, in the same order. All that is new is a vertical hung beneath it.

Keep the roof wide and the vertical dead centre. If the roof narrows, 个 starts to look like 人 with an accident underneath.

This is the cheapest character in the chapter and it does the most work in the one after it.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 人 — then 个, which is 人 with a line under it
- *Cover:* write 个 from memory

Before you move on

How many strokes does 个 have? (**Three.**) Which character are the first two? (人.) And the third? (**A vertical, straight down from the junction.**)

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 个, pinned stroke paths and medians.

24.4 个 — the word that goes between a number and a thing

One lesson back, and this is what the numerals were for.

- *Recall:* say *gè* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *Hànyǔ, wǒ kàn shū* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back

- *Recall*: say *bā* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *bā* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *guó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *dàxuésheng* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Grammar Lens: number + 个 + noun

In Mandarin a number cannot touch a noun. Something has to stand between them, and 个 is the one that fits almost everything.

Wrong: 三人 **Right:** 三个人 *sān ge rén* — three people
Right: 一个学生 *yí ge xuésheng* — one student **Right:**
 五个名字 — five names

You have been able to count to ninety-nine since the last chapter and there has been nothing to count. This is the missing piece, and it is one character.

English does this in a few places and does not notice: *three head of cattle*, *two slices of bread*, *a pair of trousers*. Mandarin does it **every time**, for every noun, without exception.

The sounds and tones in this word

个 is *gè*, **fourth tone** — the sharp fall, the same shape as 四 and 六. But in the middle of a count it usually goes **light and toneless**: *sān ge rén*, not *sān gè rén*. It behaves the way 吗 and 的 do — a small word leaning on its neighbours.

And one sandhi you already own comes back here. 一 is first tone alone, and before a fourth-tone syllable it rises: 一个 is *yí ge*, not *yī ge*. That is the same tone change the hundred lesson taught on 一百. Mandarin has dozens of measure words, each tied to a shape or a kind of thing, and 个 is the general-purpose one. Use 个 when you do not know which is right, and you will be understood every time.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *sān ge rén* — 三个人
- *yí ge xuésheng* — 一个学生
- 五个名字

Before you move on

What has to stand between a number and a noun? (**A measure word** — 个 fits almost everything.) What is wrong with 三人? (**Nothing stands between the number and the noun.**) How is 一个 said? (*Yí ge* — 一 rises before a fourth tone.)

24.5 我有一个名字

The chapter closes with the sentence its two characters were for.

- *Recall*: say *gè* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *wǒ de shū* — *kàn shū de rén* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *jiǔ* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *jiǔ* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *guó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *dàxué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

What you've built — have, and count

Two characters this chapter, nine strokes between them, and here is the sentence they buy:

我有一个名字 *wǒ yǒu yí ge míngzi* — I have a name.

Everything in it except 有 and 个 was already yours: 我 from the chapter where you said who you were, 一 from the counting chapter, 名字 from the naming one. The chapter did not add a sentence; it added the two words that let the sentence exist.

And the same nine strokes give:

有人 — there is somebody. 三个学生 — three students.
我有一个中国名字 — I have a Chinese name.

Listen. *Wǒ yǒu yí ge míngzi. Yǒu rén. Sān ge xuésheng.*

Speak. Say what you have; then count three of something.

Read. 我有一个名字 — 有人 — 三个学生

Write. 有 — bar, long fall, 月. 个 — 人, then a line.

Your turn

- *Say it:* 我有一个名字
- *Say it:* 有人 三个学生
- *Write it:* 有 个

Before you move on

Say “I have a name.” (我有一个名字.) What does 有 do besides *have*? (**It says *there is*.**) And why can 三 not sit straight against 人? (**A number needs a measure word — 三个人.**)

Chapter 25

Le — Finished, and Changed

Modes:  voice (4)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say that an action is finished, that a situation has changed, and explain why neither of those is a tense.

Two strokes — fewer than any character in the book but 一 and 二 — and with them the first sentences in this track that are not happening now.

25.1 了 — two strokes

A new chapter, and the smallest character in it does the most.

- *Recall:* say *wǒ yǒu yí ge míngzì* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *yǒu* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *shí* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *shí* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall:* say *guó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *sheng* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — a turn, and a hook

了

Two strokes. Only 一 and 二 have used fewer.

1. the **héngpiě**: start with a short flat run at the upper left, then let it fall away to the right — **one stroke, one turn, no lift**
2. the **shùgōu**: lift, come down from under that turn almost to the floor of the square, and flick left at the very end

The hook at the foot is not decoration; it is what tells 了 apart from a bare vertical. Finish it.

You have written a **héngzhé** — a horizontal that turns down — in every □ since the fourth chapter. This is its cousin: the turn does not go straight down, it falls away.

Two strokes, and no tone. For a character that carries more grammar than any other in this book, it asks remarkably little of the hand.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 了 — the turn, then the hooked vertical
- *Cover:* write it again, and check the hook is there

Before you move on

How many strokes does 了 have? (**Two.**) Which characters use fewer? (一 **and** 二.) What must the second stroke end with? (**A hook to the left.**)

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 了, pinned stroke paths and medians.

25.2 我看了书 — the thing is done

One lesson back, and the character is already under your pen.

- *Recall:* say *le* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *yǒu* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back

- *Recall*: say *yī èr sān sì wǔ liù qī bā jiǔ shí* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shíyī* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zhōngguó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *xuésheng* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Grammar Lens: verb + 了 = finished

了 *le* — toneless, and placed **straight after the verb**. It says the action is **complete**.

我看书 — I read. / I'm reading. 我看了书 *wǒ kàn le shū* — I read it. I've read it. Done.

The verb did not move and did not change — the last chapter's rule holds. One small word went in behind it, and the event closed.

我有了名字 — I've got a name now. 你看了吗 *nǐ kàn le ma* — have you read it?

That last one puts 了 and 吗 in the same sentence, each doing its own job at its own end: 了 sits behind the verb, 吗 at the very finish.

What you've built — the past this book could not reach

Until this line, **everything in this book happened in an eternal present**. Every sentence you could build was now, and there was no way to say a thing had already happened.

Spanish spends an imperfect, a preterite with two irregular sets, a present perfect and two participles on the same job. English has *read*, *have read*, *had read*, *was reading*. Mandarin has 了 and, when it needs one, a word for *yesterday*.

The verb still does not change. It never will. What changed is that a finished event can now be told apart from an unfinished one — and that is done by adding a particle, not by reshaping a word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 我看书 — 我看了书
- *wǒ yǒu le míngzi* — 我有了名字
- 你看了吗

Before you move on

Where does 了 go? (**Straight after the verb.**) What does it say? (**The action is finished.**) What happened to the verb when you added it? (**Nothing** — verbs never change.)

25.3 我是大学生了 — something has changed

One lesson back, and the same character in a different slot.

- *Recall*: say *le* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *gè* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *èrshí* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *bǎi* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zhōngwén* — *zhōngguó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *xué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Grammar Lens: 了 at the end says the situation is new

Put 了 at the very **end** of a sentence, after everything else, and it stops talking about the verb and starts talking about the situation:

我是大学生了 *wǒ shì dàxuéshēng le* — I'm a university student **now**. 有人了 — somebody's here **now**. 我看书了 — I'm reading now. (*I wasn't before*)

This 了 hangs off a whole finished sentence, not off any one word in it. That is why it goes last and why nothing may follow it.

The English word that keeps appearing in those translations is *now*, and it is not a translation of 了. It is what English has to reach for to carry what 了 does: *this was not so before, and it is so now*. Nothing in the Mandarin says *now*.

我是大学生 — I am a university student. (*a fact*)

我是大学生了 — I've become one. (*a change*)

Two slots, two jobs, one character. Behind the verb, 了 closes an action. At the end of the sentence, it opens a new state. This is what a language does when it refuses to inflect: it moves a small word around instead of reshaping a big one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 我是大学生 — 我是大学生了
- 有人了
- 我看了书 — 我看书了

Before you move on

Where does this 了 go? (**At the very end of the sentence.**)

What does it say? (**Something has changed.**) Is it the same character as the last lesson's? (**Yes** — same two strokes, different slot, different job.)

25.4 了 — aspect, and why it is not a tense

The chapter's fourth lesson, and it names what the other three were doing.

- *Recall*: say *wǒ shì dàxuéshēng le* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays

- *Recall*: say *gè* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *yìbǎi* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *wǔ* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zì* — *hànzì* — *hànyǔ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *xué* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Grammar Lens: Mandarin marks completion, not time

了 is not a past tense. It marks **aspect** — whether an event is complete — and says nothing at all about when it happened.

Here is the proof, and it is the reason this lesson exists:

我看了书 — I read the book. (*finished* — *could be an hour ago*) 我看了书你看吗 — I've finished the book; are you going to read it?

The second sentence is not in the past. 了 says the reading is **over**, and whether that was this morning or will be by tonight is settled by a time word, not by the verb and not by 了.

So Mandarin splits the job English and Spanish fuse.

when it happened	a time word — <i>yesterday, now, tomorrow</i>
whether it is finished	a particle — 了

An English verb carries both at once: *read* against *reads* against *have read*. A Spanish verb carries both and the person as well. Mandarin carries neither in the verb, because the verb does not change — the last chapter's rule, arriving where it matters most.

This is the single largest shape difference between Mandarin and the languages this book's reader is likeliest to arrive from, and 了 is where a beginner first meets it. 了 is one of several aspect particles; the others come later.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 我看了书
- 我看了书你看吗
- aspect is *whether it is finished*; tense is *when*

Before you move on

Is 了 a past tense? (**No** — it is aspect.) What does it actually mark? (**Whether the event is finished.**) What settles when something happened? (**A time word**, not the verb.)

25.5 我看了书

The chapter closes on two strokes.

- *Recall*: say *le* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *wǒ yǒu yí ge míngzi* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shíyī èrshí jiúshíjiǔ yìbǎi* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *hǎo bu hǎo* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zì — hàn zì — hàn yǔ — zhōng wén — zhōng guó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *dà jiā* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

What you've built — two strokes, and time itself

Before this chapter every sentence in this book happened now. After it:

1. 我看了书 — a finished action. 了 behind the verb.
2. 我是大学生了 — a changed state. 了 at the end.
3. **Neither is a tense.** Mandarin marks whether, not when.

Two strokes did that. Compare the price: the verb chapter needed a character each for 看 and 书, and neither of them changed what could be *said about time*.

Listen. *Wǒ kàn le shū. Wǒ shì dàxuéshēng le. Nǐ kàn le ma?*

Speak. Say you have read the book; then say you have become a student.

Read. 我看了书 — 有人了 — 你看了吗

Write. 了 — the turn, then the hook.

Your turn

- *Say it:* 我看了书
- *Say it:* 我是大学生了
- *Say it:* 你看了吗
- *Write it:* 了

Before you move on

Name the two slots 了 uses and what each does. (**After the verb, the action is finished; at the end, the situation has changed.**) Is either one a tense? (**No** — both are aspect.) How many strokes? (**Two.**)

Chapter 26

Ne and Dui

Modes: ⇄ voice (2) 👁 eyes (1) ✍ pen (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can hand a question back with 呢, agree with what somebody has said, and ask whether something is right.

Thirteen strokes make the first two-sided exchange in this book: 吗 could ask, and until now nothing could hand the question back or agree with the answer.

26.1 呢 — 吗's shape, a different sound

A new chapter, and its first character is one you half know.

- *Recall:* say *wǒ kàn le shū* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *le* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *kàn* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *hǎo bu hǎo* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall:* say *zì* — *hànzì* — *hànyǔ* — *zhōngwén* — *zhōngguó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *dà* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — the same mouth, a different right half

呢

Eight strokes, and the first three are ones you have written since the fourth chapter.

1. 口's **shù** down the left side
2. 口's **héngzhé** across the top and down the right
3. 口's **héng** closing the floor

That is the same 口, in the same order, set small and high in the upper-left third of the square — **exactly where 吗 puts it**. Finish it before the right half starts.

Then 尼 *ní*, which supplies only the sound:

1. the **héngzhé** across the top of the right half and down at its right
2. the **héng** beneath it
3. the long **piě**, falling from the top all the way down to the lower left, past the bottom of 口
4. a short **piě** inside, falling left
5. the **shùwāngōu**, turning along the base and finishing to the right

Stroke 6 is the one that carries the character. It starts high and reaches the lower-left corner, and everything after it tucks inside.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 口 — then 呢, mouth first
- *Cover:* write 吗 and 呢 side by side and compare the left halves

Before you move on

Which three strokes open 呢? (口's — vertical, turn, floor.) Which other character starts the same way? (吗.) Which stroke is the long one? (**The sixth**, falling to the lower left.)

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 呢, pinned stroke paths and medians.

26.2 呢 — and you?

One lesson back, and the character is under your pen.

- *Recall*: say *ne* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *le* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *wǒ shì* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shì ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *zì — hàn zì — hàn yǔ — zhōng wén — zhōng guó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *dà* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Grammar Lens: put 呢 after a noun and it asks the last question again

呢 *ne* — toneless, placed after a noun or a pronoun. It repeats whatever question was on the table, about this one instead.

— 你是学生吗 — Are you a student? — 我是学生你呢 *nǐ ne* — I'm a student. **And you?**

你呢 is two syllables and a complete turn. Nothing has to be repeated: 呢 carries the whole of the previous question with it.

我是中国人你呢 我有一个名字你呢 我看了书你呢

Every one of those means something different, and 呢 is the same in all of them, because the question it asks is whichever one was already on the table.

What you've built — the second particle, and the pair

Keep 吗 and 呢 apart by what comes before them:

吗	after a whole statement	你是学生吗 — a yes-or-no question
呢	after a noun	你呢 — the last question, asked again

They cannot be swapped. 你吗 is not a question and 你是学生呢 is not the question you meant.

呢 is the second of Mandarin's particles this book has taught, and the third toneless word after 吗 and 的. **A Mandarin sentence's grammar lives in words like these** — small, unstressed, unchanging, and placed rather than inflected. That is what the reader is learning each time one arrives.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 我是学生你呢
- 我是中国人你呢
- 你是学生吗 — 你呢 — hear the difference

Before you move on

What does 呢 do? (**Asks the last question again, about somebody else.**) What comes before it? (**A noun** — 你呢.) And what comes before 吗? (**A whole statement.**)

26.3 对 — five strokes, and a hand on the left

Two lessons in, and this one is short.

- *Recall*: say *ne* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *wǒ shì dàxuéshēng le* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shū* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back

- *Recall:* say *shì ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall:* say *zì — hàn zì — hàn yǔ — zhōng wén — zhōng guó* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *rén — nǚ — ér zǐ — nǚ'ér — jiā — jiā rén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — a hand, and a thumb's width

对

Five strokes. Two on the left, three on the right.

The left half is 又, an old picture of a hand:

1. the **héngpiě** — a short flat start that turns and falls to the lower left, one stroke, no lift
2. the **nà**, crossing it and falling to the lower right

The right half is 寸:

1. the **héng** across the right half
2. the long **shùgōu** down through it, hooking left at the foot
3. the **diǎn** dot, placed last, to the left of the hook

The dot is the final stroke — the same rule 的 followed. And the left half is finished before the right begins, as always.

Hold on to strokes 1 and 2. That 又 opens 欢 two chapters from now, and you will not have to learn it twice.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 对 — 又's two, then 寸's three, dot last
- *Cover:* write it again from memory

Before you move on

How many strokes does 对 have? (**Five.**) Which stroke is the dot? (**The last.**) And which later character shares its left half? (欢.)
 Source: Hanzi Writer Data 对, pinned stroke paths and medians.

26.4 对 — right, and the sound of agreeing

One lesson back, and this word does two jobs.

- *Recall:* say *duì* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *le* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *Zhōngguó rén* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *nǐ hǎo ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall:* say *kàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *jiārén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

The sounds and tones in this word

对 *duì* is **fourth tone** — the sharp fall, the same shape as 四, 六 and 个.

对 — Right. Correct. 不对 *bú duì* — Wrong. Not right.
 对不对 *duì bu duì* — Right or not?

That last one is a shape you already own. The asking chapter taught 好不好, the verb-not-verb question, and 对不对 is the same pattern on a new word — no new grammar at all, one new syllable.

And the 不 in front of 对 rises: *bú duì*, not *bù duì*. That is the 不 sandhi the 是 chapter taught on 不是, working exactly as it did there, because 对 is fourth tone too.

Why it's said this way

On its own, 对 is what a Mandarin speaker says while somebody else is talking to show they are following and they agree. English uses *right*, *yeah*, *mm*; Mandarin uses 对, often doubled — 对对
Until this line, this book had no backchannel at all. You could greet, ask, count and name, and while somebody spoke to you there was nothing to say. That is not a small gap: a listener who makes no sound at all reads, in Mandarin as in English, as a listener who has not understood.

— 你是中国人吗 — 对

Two syllables, and a whole exchange finished.

Careful with one thing. 对 agrees with a **statement**. It is not a general *yes*: asked a question with a verb in it, a Mandarin speaker answers by repeating the verb — 是 for a 是 question, 有 for a 有 question. 对 is for agreeing that what was said is so.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 对 不对 对不对
- 你是中国人吗 — 对
- 对对

Before you move on

What does 对 mean? (**Right, correct.**) What does it do on its own in a conversation? (**Shows you are following and agree.**) And how is 不对 said? (*Bú duì* — 不 rises before a fourth tone.)

26.5 你呢 — 对不对

The chapter closes with an exchange rather than a word.

- *Recall*: say *duì* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays

- *Recall*: say *wǒ kàn le shū* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *Zhōngguó rén — shū — kàn* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *nǐ hǎo ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *kàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *yán* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

What you've built — a turn each way

Two characters, thirteen strokes, and here is what they buy — a conversation that goes both ways:

— 你是学生吗 — 对你呢 — 我是大学生了 — 对对

Every line of that is short, and none of it was sayable before this chapter. 吗 could ask; nothing could hand the question back, and nothing could agree.

呢 after a noun asks the last question again. 对 agrees with a statement. 吗 after a whole statement asks a yes-or-no question. Three particles, three slots, and not one of them changes shape.

Listen. *Nǐ shì xuésheng ma? — Duì. Nǐ ne?*

Speak. Answer, then hand it back with 你呢.

Read. 你是学生吗 — 对 — 你呢

Write. 呢 — 口 first. 对 — 又 first, dot last.

Your turn

- *Say it*: 你是学生吗 — 对你呢
- *Say it*: 对不对 — 对
- *Write it*: 呢 对

Before you move on

Which particle hands the question back? (呢, after a noun.) Which word agrees with a statement? (对.) And which one turns a statement into a question? (吗, at the end.)

Chapter 27

Age, and And

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) 👁 eyes (2) ✍ pen (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say how old I am in a sentence with no verb in it, and join two nouns with 和 while knowing it may not join two sentences.

岁 gives the numerals their first thing to measure, and 和 is the first joining word this track has ever had — one that teaches where it may not go.

27.1 岁 — six strokes, and a rule that is not left-to-right

A new chapter, and its first character breaks a habit.

- Recall: say *nǐ ne* — *duì bu duì* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- Recall: say *ne* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- Recall: say *de* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- Recall: say *ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- Recall: say *kàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- Recall: say *shénme* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — a mountain, then an evening

岁

Six strokes, three on top and three beneath.

The top is 山 *shān*, a mountain — and it is written in an order the rules you have been given do not predict:

1. the **shù** down the **middle**
2. the **shùzhé** — down the left side, then turn and run along the base
3. the **shù** down the right side

Centre before the sides. Every character so far has gone top before bottom and left before right, and those two rules decide almost everything in Chinese writing. 山 is where they run out, and the answer is a third rule: when a shape has a clear middle and two wings, the middle goes first.

The bottom is 夕 *xī*, an evening:

1. a short **piě** falling to the lower left
2. the **héngzhégōu**, turning down and falling to the lower left with a hook
3. the **diǎn** dot laid across it

Top before bottom holds between the halves, as always.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 山 — middle first, then left, then right
- *Write it:* 岁 — 山 on top, 夕 beneath
- *Cover:* write 岁 from memory

Before you move on

How many strokes does 岁 have? (**Six.**) Which stroke of 山 comes first? (**The middle one.**) What sits underneath? (夕, an evening.)
Source: Hanzi Writer Data 岁, pinned stroke paths and medians.

27.2 岁 — how old you are

One lesson back, and the numerals finally do something.

- *Recall*: say *sui* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *ne* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *de* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *ma* — **R3**, durable again, a second word from that distance
- *Recall*: say *kàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *shénme* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

The sounds and tones in this word

岁 *sui* is **fourth tone** — the sharp fall, like 四 and 对.

It counts **years of age**, and only that. It is not the word for a year on a calendar.

十八岁 *shíbā sui* — eighteen years old 二十岁 — twenty
九十九岁 — ninety-nine

Every one of those numbers came from the decimal chapter, and until this word there was nothing for them to measure.

Grammar Lens: the sentence with no verb in it

我十八岁 *wǒ shíbā sui* — I am eighteen.

Read that again and look for the verb. **There is none**. No 是, no anything. Subject, number, 岁, stop.

English needs *am*. Spanish needs *tengo*. Mandarin puts an age straight after the person and is finished — and putting 是 in is a mistake a beginner makes for months: 我是十八岁 is wrong.

The question is built the same way, with 吗 doing what it always does:

你十八岁吗 — are you eighteen?

And now three things this book taught separately can be said in one breath:

我是中国人 — 我有一个名字 — 我十八岁

Name, nationality, age — the three pieces of personal information any beginner's paper asks for, and the last of them was waiting on this one character.

One habit worth knowing. Mandarin asks a small child's age with one question and an adult's with another, and both need words this book has not taught yet. What this lesson gives you is the answer, which is the half you are asked for.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *shíbā suì* — 十八岁
- 我十八岁 — and hear that there is no verb
- 你十八岁吗

Before you move on

What does 岁 count? (**Years of age.**) What verb does 我十八岁 use? (**None** — there is no verb in it.) What is the commonest beginner's mistake here? (**Putting 是 in.**)

27.3 和 — eight strokes, and the right half is a mouth

Two lessons in, and three of these eight strokes are already yours.

- *Recall:* say *suì* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *duì* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *kàn shū de rén* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *kàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *me* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — 禾 first, then 口

和

Eight strokes, five on the left and three on the right — and the three on the right are 口, which you have written since the fourth chapter.

The left half is 禾 *hé*, standing grain:

1. a short **piě** at the very top, falling left
2. the **héng** beneath it
3. the long **shù** straight down the middle
4. a **piě** falling to the lower left
5. a **diǎn** closing to the lower right

Then 口, in its usual order:

1. the **shù** down its left side
2. the **héngzhé** across the top and down the right
3. the **héng** closing the floor

Left half complete before the right one starts, as always.

This is a **phono-semantic compound**, the kind the 请 lesson named: one part carries meaning and the other carries sound. Here the sounding half is unusually generous — 禾 is itself said *hé*, so the character tells you its own pronunciation outright.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 禾 — then 和, with 口 on the right
- *Cover:* write 和 from memory

Before you move on

How many strokes does 和 have? (**Eight** — five plus 口's three.) Which half supplies the sound? (禾, which is itself *hé*.) Which earlier character worked the same way? (请.)

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 和, pinned stroke paths and medians.

27.4 和 — and, between things only

One lesson back, and this word opens a column this book has never had.

- *Recall*: say *hé* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *duì* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *Hànyǔ, wǒ kàn shū* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *kànjàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *shén* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

The sounds and tones in this word

和 *hé* is **second tone** — the rise, the same shape as 十 and 人.

你和我 *nǐ hé wǒ* — you and I 书和名字 — books and names
中国人和学生

It stands between the two things and joins them. Nothing agrees, nothing changes, and it is the same word however many things there are.

Grammar Lens: it joins nouns, and only nouns

和 joins two nouns. It does NOT join two sentences.

This is the part an English or Spanish speaker gets wrong on the first day, because in their language one word does both:

Right: 我和你 — you and I (*two nouns*) **Wrong:**
我看书和你看书 — not Mandarin at all

English says *I read and you read*. Spanish says *yo leo y tú lees*. Mandarin will not use 和 there at all. To join two statements it **puts them next to each other**, with a comma and no joining word:

我看书 — 你看书 — I read, and you read.

Mandarin writes a comma at that seam; this book prints a dash, because it has taught no punctuation. What matters is that **there is no joining word in it at all**. That is not a shortcut or a casual register — it is how Mandarin does it, and the words that **DO** join clauses are different words for different relations, *because*, *but*, *or*, none of which is 和 and none of which this book has yet taught. **So 和 is the first joining word in this track**, and the first thing it teaches is where it may not go.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *nǐ hé wǒ* — 你和我
- 书和名字
- 我看书 — 你看书 — two sentences, no 和

Before you move on

What does 和 join? (**Two nouns**.) What does it never join? (**Two sentences**.) How does Mandarin join two statements instead? (**It puts them side by side**, with a comma.)

27.5 我十八岁 — 你和我

The chapter closes on two unrelated characters that each open a column.

- *Recall*: say *hé* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *nǐ ne* — *duì bu duì* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *wǒ de shū* — *kàn shū de rén* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *kànjàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *wǒ shì* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

What you've built — an age, and a join

Two characters, fourteen strokes, and each one opens something the track has never had.

岁 gives the numerals something to measure. The decimal chapter reached ninety-nine and had nothing to count; 我十八岁 is the first sentence in this book that uses a number to say something true about a person — and it does it with no verb at all.

和 is the first joining word in the whole track. It joins two nouns and it refuses two sentences, and knowing the refusal is most of the lesson. Put them together with what you already have:

我是中国人 — 我有一个名字 — 我十八岁 你和我是学生

Listen. *Wǒ shíbā suì. Nǐ hé wǒ shì xuésheng.*

Speak. Give your age with no verb; then join two people with 和.

Read. 我十八岁 — 你和我是学生

Write. 岁 — 山 middle-first, then 夕. 和 — 禾, then 口.

Your turn

- *Say it:* 我十八岁
- *Say it:* 你和我是学生
- *Write it:* 岁 和

Before you move on

What verb does an age sentence use? (**None.**) What does 和 join, and what does it refuse? (**Nouns; sentences.**) Which stroke of 山 comes first? (**The middle one.**)

Chapter 28

Xihuan — What You Like

Modes: ⇄ voice (3) ✍ pen (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: none of the 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what I like and do not like, and ask somebody else what they like.

Eighteen strokes and one verb, and the liking frame every other language in this series makes a beginner turn round: in Mandarin the liker is simply the subject.

28.1 喜 — twelve strokes, stacked in four bands

A new chapter, and its first character is the tallest in the book.

- *Recall:* say *wǒ shíbā suì — nǐ hé wǒ — R1*, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *suì — R2*, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *yǒu — R3*, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *hǎokàn — R4*, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *míngzì — R4*, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — read it downwards, in four bands

喜

Twelve strokes — more than any character you have written. Do not count them. **Read the character downwards in four bands**, and every band is a shape you already know.

Band one — 士, **three strokes**. A long **héng** across the top, a **shù** down through it, a shorter **héng** beneath. That is 十 with a longer bar on top.

Band two — 口, **three strokes**. Left side, joined top-and-right, closing floor. The same mouth as always.

Band three — **two short strokes**, a small pair leaning apart under the 口.

Band four — **one long héng**, then 口 **again**. Stroke 9 is the widest stroke in the character, running edge to edge, and it carries everything above it. Then the lower 口, in its usual three.

$3 + 3 + 2 + 1 + 3 =$ twelve.

Top before bottom, all the way down. Two 口, and both of them are written the way you have written 口 since 吗.

Your turn

- *Write it:* 士 — 口 — the small pair — the long bar — 口
- *Write it:* 喜, all twelve, downwards
- *Cover:* write it again and count the bands, not the strokes

Before you move on

How many strokes does 喜 have? (**Twelve**.) How many bands? (**Four**.) How many of them are 口? (**Two** — the middle band and the last.)

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 喜, pinned stroke paths and medians.

28.2 欢 — six strokes, and two of them are already yours

One lesson back, and this one is short by comparison.

- *Recall*: say *xǐ* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *sui* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *yǒu* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *hǎokàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *zì* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

Script — 又 again, then 欠

欢

Six strokes, and the first two are ones you wrote one chapter ago.
The left half is 又, the hand:

1. the **héngpiě** — a short flat start that turns and falls to the lower left
2. the **nà**, crossing it and falling to the lower right

That is exactly how 对 begins. Same pair, same order, same place in the square.

The right half is 欠 *qiàn*, a person with an open mouth:

1. a short **piě** at the top, falling left
2. the **hénggōu** — a horizontal that hooks down at its end
3. the long **piě**, falling from under the hook to the lower left
4. the **nà**, falling to the lower right and reaching furthest of all

Strokes 5 and 6 are the character's legs, and they must both reach out. Cramped, 欢 looks like something else; spread, it is unmistakable.

After 喜's twelve, six will feel like nothing.

Your turn

- *Write it*: 又 — the two strokes that also open 对
- *Write it*: 欢, all six
- *Cover*: write 对 and 欢 side by side and check the left halves match

Before you move on

How many strokes does 欢 have? (**Six.**) Which character shares its left half? (对.) Which two strokes are the legs? (**The fifth and sixth** — both must reach out.)

Source: Hanzi Writer Data 欢, pinned stroke paths and medians.

28.3 喜欢 — what you like

Two characters in, and now they say something.

- *Recall:* say *huān* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall:* say *hé* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall:* say *gè* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall:* say *kàn* — *kànjàn* — *hǎokàn* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall:* say *míng* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

The sounds and tones in this word

喜欢 is *xǐhuan* — **third tone, then nothing.**

喜 is third tone, the dip. 欢 is first tone on its own — but inside this word it **loses its tone altogether** and goes light: *xǐ-huan*, not *xǐ-huān*. That is the same thing 早上 does to 上, and 名字 to 字. Say it once slowly and once at speed: **xǐ huan**.

Grammar Lens: the liker is the subject, and that is all

person + 喜欢 + the thing liked.

我喜欢看书 *wǒ xǐhuan kàn shū* — I like reading.

我喜欢中国 — I like China. 你喜欢汉语吗 — do you like Chinese?

That is an ordinary sentence with an ordinary verb and an ordinary object, and saying so is the point. Spanish and Italian make a beginner turn the sentence round: Spanish says *me gusta el libro* — “the book pleases me” — and Italian says *mi piace*, with the liker in an object

slot and the thing liked as the subject. Learners spend weeks on it. **Mandarin asks nothing of you here.** The person who likes goes in front, the verb does not change, and the thing liked follows. It is the same shape as 我看书.

And 不 works on it normally, which 有 did not:

我不喜欢看书 — I don't like reading.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *xǐhuan* — 喜欢, and let 欢 go light
- 我喜欢看书
- 我不喜欢看书

Before you move on

What tones does 喜欢 carry? (**Third, then none** — 欢 goes light.)

Who goes in front of it? (**The person who likes** — no inversion.)

Does 不 negate it normally? (**Yes** — 我不喜欢.)

28.4 你喜欢什么 — what do you like?

Four in, and this lesson joins two chapters that never met.

- *Recall*: say *xǐhuan* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *hé* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *gè* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shū* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *wǒ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

You'll want to know: the question, and where 什么 sits

你喜欢什么 *nǐ xǐhuan shénme* — **what do you like?**

Four words, and all of them were already in the book except 喜欢.

Now look at where 什么 is. It is at the END, in exactly the slot the answer would occupy:

— 你喜欢什么 — what do you like? — 我喜欢书 — I like books.

Mandarin does not move a question word. English hauls *what* to the front and reshuffles everything behind it — *you like what* becomes *what do you like*, with a *do* invented on the way. Mandarin leaves 什么 exactly where the answer goes and changes nothing else. Question and answer have the same shape, word for word.

That is why no 吗 is needed here. 吗 makes a yes-or-no question; a sentence that already contains 什么 is a question, and adding 吗 would be wrong.

你喜欢汉语吗 — do you like Chinese? (*yes or no*) 你喜欢什么
— what do you like? (*name it*)

And the whole exchange, with the particle from the last chapter:

— 你喜欢什么 — 我喜欢看书你呢

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- 你喜欢什么
- 我喜欢看书你呢
- 你喜欢汉语吗 — and hear why this one needs 吗

Before you move on

Where does 什么 stand? (**Where the answer goes** — at the end.) Does Mandarin move it to the front? (**No** — nothing moves.) Why is there no 吗? (**A sentence with 什么 in it is already a question.**)

28.5 我喜欢看书

The last chapter of the tranche closes here.

- *Recall*: say *nǐ xǐhuan shénme* — **R1**, one lesson back, before it decays
- *Recall*: say *wǒ shíba suì — nǐ hé wǒ* — **R2**, the first real retrieval, five to fifteen lessons back
- *Recall*: say *wǒ yǒu yí ge míngzi* — **R3**, durable, twenty to sixty lessons back
- *Recall*: say *shū* — **R4**, recognition at distance, eighty lessons back or more
- *Recall*: say *wǒ* — **R4**, recognition at distance, a second word from that far back

What you've built — liking, said plainly

Two characters, eighteen strokes, one verb — and with it a whole area of talk this book could not enter:

我喜欢看书 — I like reading. 我不喜欢看书 — I don't.
你喜欢什么 — what do you like? 你喜欢汉语吗 — do you like Chinese?

Nothing there is inverted, nothing agrees, nothing moves. The liker is the subject; the thing liked is the object; 什么 stands where the answer stands. Spanish and Italian both make you turn that round; Mandarin does not.

And now the whole tranche can be said in one breath, because every piece of it is yours:

我是中国人 — 我十八岁 — 我有一个名字 — 我喜欢看书 — 你呢

Listen. *Wǒ xǐhuan kàn shū. Nǐ xǐhuan shénme?*

Speak. Say what you like; ask what the other person likes; hand it back with 你呢.

Read. 我喜欢看书 — 你喜欢什么

Write. 喜 — four bands, twelve strokes. 欢 — 又, then 欠.

Your turn

- *Say it:* 我喜欢看书 我不喜欢看书
- *Say it:* 你喜欢什么 — 我喜欢书你呢
- *Write it:* 喜 欢

Before you move on

Say “I like reading.” (我喜欢看书.) Where does 什么 go in the question? (**At the end, where the answer goes.**) And what does Mandarin ask you to turn round here? (**Nothing at all.**)

Chapter 29

Reading — Characters, Words, and a First Passage

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) 👁️ eyes (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: none of the 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read a Chinese character cold, find where a word ends when nothing marks it, and hold a whole passage without translating it character by character.

Thirty-four characters in a row with no new character in them, including the first line in the book whose meaning depends on the lines before it.

29.1 (reading) — six characters, nothing said first

You have written every one of these. Not one is new.

What is new is that nobody is going to say them first.

Read this

人 书 看 有 和 十

Read down the list once. Do not count strokes — look at the whole character and let it arrive.

Again, and notice which came at once and which you had to take apart. Both are fine. The difference is what practice removes.

What to know first

In an alphabet a single letter is almost never a word. Here every one of these six is.

That changes what reading is. There is no sounding out: a character either lands whole or it does not land, and the only thing that moves it from the second to the first is having met it before.

Six is enough for one sitting, because six is already six words.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six characters down the list, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

How many of them are whole words? (**All six.**)

29.2 (reading) — six words, not six characters

The last lesson gave you six characters that were each a word.

These are six words that are not each a character.

Every character in them is still one you have written.

Read this

中国人 我的书 看书的人 一个 十八岁 喜欢

Read down once, without stopping.

Again — and this time notice there is nothing between the characters.

No space tells you where one word ends.

What to know first

看书的人 is four characters and one idea: the person who reads. You know all four, and knowing them is not the same as seeing where the join falls.

That is the work this lesson does. Mandarin writes no spaces, so a reader has to decide where a word ends, and the only tool for it is having met the word before.

喜欢 is the clearest case: two characters that mean nothing apart, and *to like* together.

Your turn

- *Say it*: the six words down the list, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many characters are in 看书的人? (**Four.**) How many words? (**One.**)

What tells you where a word ends? (**Nothing on the page** — only having met it.)

29.3 (reading) — the first passage

Six characters, then six words. Now ten lines.

Thirty-four characters, and not one of them is new.

Read this

我是中国人 我有一个名字 我看书 我喜欢看书 我十八岁
你呢 对不对 你好 谢谢 再见

Read it through once without stopping. Do not translate as you go. Again — and this time notice that the passage turns at line six. The first five are about the writer. The last five are addressed to you.

What to know first

你呢 is two characters and does the work of a whole English sentence: *and what about you?* It only means that because of the five lines before it, which is the first time this book has asked a line to depend on what came earlier.

我十八岁 has no verb in it at all. Mandarin states an age by putting the number and 岁 straight after the person, and a reader who waits for a verb waits forever.

This is the first whole passage the book has asked you to hold at once, and it works because every character was paid for.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the passage aloud, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

Which line depends on the five before it? (你呢)

Which line has no verb? (我十八岁 — and it needs none.)

Pronunciation & Character Guide

Reference material, never a gate. Every lesson teaches the sounds its own word needs, inline, and links here for anyone who wants the fuller picture. Nobody has to read this page before Lesson 1, and most readers never will.

The ids in each heading are the values a lesson's **sounds**: frontmatter list points at.

Why this page is different from every other track's

In an alphabetic or abugida track, “the sounds you’ll need” is a list of *segments*: this letter is silent, that vowel is long, this consonant is retroflex. Each fact is attached to a letter, and the letter is on the page.

Mandarin adds a second, orthogonally different kind of fact. **Tone** rides on a whole syllable, is not written in the characters at all, and is *phonemic* — it distinguishes words the way a consonant does. A segmental note cannot express it. So this page has two halves: tones first, because they are the part an English speaker has no instinct for, then the segments.

The machine-readable form of the first half lives in the Chinese script reference under **tones** and **toneSandhi**.

Tones

Mandarin has four tones plus a neutral one. Pinyin writes the tone as a mark over the vowel; the characters do not record it anywhere.

The classic demonstration uses one syllable, *ma*:

- **tone-1** — first, high level (contour 55). Held high and flat, one steady note. *mā* — mother.
- **tone-2** — second, rising (35). Climbs from mid to high, like the pitch on a surprised English “huh?”. *má* — hemp.

- **tone-3** — third, dipping (214). Sinks low and creaky; said alone it rises again a little at the end, but in running speech it usually just stays low. *mǎ* — horse.
- **tone-4** — fourth, falling (51). Drops sharply from high to low, like a clipped “No!”. *mà* — to scold.
- **tone-neutral** — unstressed. Short and light, with no mark written at all, pitched by whatever came before it. *ma* — a question particle.

tone-lexical — tone is part of the word

The single fact that matters most, taught in the first lesson: changing the pitch of a Mandarin syllable changes **which word it is**, not how you feel about it. *mā*, *má*, *mǎ* and *mà* are four separate words. English uses pitch for mood and emphasis only, so this is a genuinely new job for an English speaker’s voice.

tone-sandhi-third — two third tones in a row

When a third tone is followed by another third tone, the first is spoken as a rising second tone.

Written **nǐ hǎo**, said **ní hǎo**. Neither the pinyin nor the characters record the change; dictionaries print the citation tone each word carries alone. This is why a reader who trusts only the page mispronounces the commonest greeting in the language.

tone-sandhi-bu — 不 before a fourth tone

不 *bù* is said *bú* when the next syllable has a fourth tone: *bù shì* → *bú shì*. Taught in full on 不是, the first collocation in the track that forces it.

Segments

Pinyin is a romanization, not English spelling. A few letters do work you would not guess.

- **pinyin-n** — as in English *no*.
- **pinyin-i** — after most consonants, the *ee* of “see”. (After *z-*, *c-*, *s-*, *zh-*, *ch-*, *sh-*, *r-* it is a different, buzzier vowel; no Chapter 1 word uses those.)

- pinyin-*h* — rougher than English *h*, scraped at the back of the mouth, closer to the *ch* of Scottish *loch* softened.
- pinyin-*ao* — one gliding vowel, the *ow* of “how”. Not two syllables.

The characters themselves

Stroke shapes, components, and stroke order for every character this track has introduced live in Chinese script reference. Unlike the Indic scripts in this curriculum, where stroke order is conventional, Chinese stroke order is a **taught, standardised system** — top before bottom, left before right, horizontal before vertical, outside before inside, and close a box last. That file marks its stroke orders **authoritative** for exactly that reason.

Glossary

This glossary collects every word and phrase taught in the book. Pronunciation appears when it differs from the written form; chapter numbers show where each entry is introduced.

八 *bā*

eight — first tone, and the luckiest number in the language
Introduced in Chapter 20.

不 *bù*

not — the character that turns a word around
Introduced in Chapter 4.

不是 *bú shì*

is not — and a pitch that moves to get out of the way
Introduced in Chapter 5.

不谢 *bú xiè*

you're welcome — real and understood everywhere, though not the commonest reply, which needs characters this book cannot yet print
Introduced in Chapter 10.

大 *dà*

big; large, now read and written
Introduced in Chapter 13.

大家 *dàjiā*

everyone, built from known characters
Introduced in Chapter 13.

大学 *dàxué*

university; college, built from known characters
Introduced in Chapter 13.

大学生 *dàxuésheng*

university student, built from known characters
Introduced in Chapter 13.

的 *de*

de — the particle that puts an owner in front of what is owned, and carries no tone
Introduced in Chapter 23.

对 *duì*

duì — 'right', and on its own the commonest way to agree in spoken Mandarin
Introduced in Chapter 26.

二 *èr*

two

Introduced in Chapter 3.

二十 *èrshí*

twenty — two ten, and the same ten words now reach ninety-nine
Introduced in Chapter 21.

儿子 *érzi*

son, now read and written

Introduced in Chapter 12.

个 *gè*

gè — the measure word, and the fact that a Mandarin number cannot touch a noun without one

Introduced in Chapter 24.

汉语 *hànyǔ*

the Chinese language; Mandarin

Introduced in Chapter 16.

汉字 *hànzì*

Chinese character; Han character

Introduced in Chapter 16.

好 *hǎo*

good, well

Introduced in Chapter 1.

好不好 *hǎo bu hǎo*

is it good, written from three characters already yours and no new shape at all

Introduced in Chapter 19.

好看 *hǎokàn*

good-looking or nice to look at

Introduced in Chapter 18.

和 *hé*

hé — 'and' between two nouns, and never between two sentences

Introduced in Chapter 27.

家 *jiā*

home or family, now read and written

Introduced in Chapter 12.

家人 *jiārén*

family members, now read and written

Introduced in Chapter 12.

九 *jiǔ*

nine — third tone, and a dip you have had since *nǐ*
Introduced in Chapter 20.

看 *kàn*

to look at or watch, recovered without pinyin
Introduced in Chapter 18.

看见 *kànjiàn*

to see or catch sight of
Introduced in Chapter 18.

看书 *kànshū*

to read a book or read books
Introduced in Chapter 18.

口 *kǒu*

mouth
Introduced in Chapter 4.

了 *le*

le after a verb: the event is finished — and this is aspect, not tense
Introduced in Chapter 25.

六 *liù*

six — the sixth number, and the first one past where this book stopped
Introduced in Chapter 20.

吗 *ma*

the question particle, recovered without pinyin
Introduced in Chapter 19.

名字 *míngzi*

name — literally the characters a name is made of
Introduced in Chapter 8.

呢 *ne*

ne — the particle that hands the question back, and turns one word into a whole
turn
Introduced in Chapter 26.

你 *nǐ*

you (one person)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

你好 *nǐ hǎo*

hello (literally “you good”)
Introduced in Chapter 1.

你好吗 *nǐ hǎo ma*

how are you, written from three characters already yours
Introduced in Chapter 19.

你喜欢什么 *nǐ xǐhuan shénme*

asking what somebody likes, out of four words the book already had
Introduced in Chapter 28.

女 *nǚ*

female; woman

Introduced in Chapter 12.

女儿 *nǚ'ér*

daughter, now read and written

Introduced in Chapter 12.

七 *qī*

seven — first tone, and a consonant English does not have

Introduced in Chapter 20.

请 *qǐng*

please — a word you can say on its own, and a frame waiting to be filled

Introduced in Chapter 11.

人 *rén*

person

Introduced in Chapter 12.

日 *rì*

sun, and also day

Introduced in Chapter 4.

三 *sān*

three

Introduced in Chapter 3.

上学 *shàngxué*

go to school; attend school, built from known characters

Introduced in Chapter 15.

什么 *shénme*

what — the first question word in this book

Introduced in Chapter 9.

十 *shí*

ten — and the last of the ten words that build every number to ninety-nine

Introduced in Chapter 20.

是 *shì*

to be — and how Mandarin says yes

Introduced in Chapter 5.

是吗 *shì ma*

is that so, written from two characters already yours

Introduced in Chapter 19.

十一 *shíyī*

eleven — ten one, and the teens are finished in a sentence

Introduced in Chapter 21.

书 *shū*

book, recovered without pinyin

Introduced in Chapter 18.

四 *sì*

four

Introduced in Chapter 3.

岁 *suì*

suì — years of age, and the sentence that says how old you are without a verb in it

Introduced in Chapter 27.

同学 *tóngxué*

classmate; schoolmate, now read and written

Introduced in Chapter 15.

我 *wǒ*

I, me — one word for both, and no change for either

Introduced in Chapter 8.

5 — 五 *wǔ*

the digit and the character — which one a price, a date and a phone number use

Introduced in Chapter 21.

五 *wǔ*

five

Introduced in Chapter 3.

小 *xiǎo*

small; little, now read and written

Introduced in Chapter 14.

小学 *xiǎoxué*

primary school, built from known characters

Introduced in Chapter 14.

小学生 *xiǎoxuésheng*

primary-school student, built from known characters

Introduced in Chapter 14.

谢谢 *xièxiè*

thank you — the same character twice, and the second one goes light

Introduced in Chapter 10.

喜欢 *xǐhuan*

xihuan — 'to like', an ordinary verb with an ordinary object, and no inversion anywhere

Introduced in Chapter 28.

学 *xué*

study; learn, now read and written
Introduced in Chapter 13.

学生 *xuésheng*

student, now read and written
Introduced in Chapter 13.

一 *yī*

one
Introduced in Chapter 3.

一百 *yìbǎi*

a hundred — and the one word in the run whose tone moves
Introduced in Chapter 21.

有 *yǒu*

yǒu — 'to have', and also 'there is': one verb where Spanish spends three points
Introduced in Chapter 24.

再见 *zàijiàn*

goodbye — two characters whose meanings genuinely add up
Introduced in Chapter 6.

早上 *zǎoshang*

morning — and a syllable with no tone at all
Introduced in Chapter 7.

早上好 *zǎoshang hǎo*

good morning — and proof that 好 was a building block
Introduced in Chapter 7.

中国 *zhōngguó*

China
Introduced in Chapter 17.

中国人 *Zhōngguó rén*

中国人 — a Chinese person, built out of three characters you already write
Introduced in Chapter 22.

中文 *zhōngwén*

Chinese; the Chinese language
Introduced in Chapter 17.

中学 *zhōngxué*

middle school, built from known characters
Introduced in Chapter 15.

中学生 *zhōngxuésheng*

middle-school student, built from known characters
Introduced in Chapter 15.

字 *zì*

a written Chinese character, recovered without pinyin
Introduced in Chapter 16.

Review Questions

Try these without looking ahead. Every prompt comes from the same canonical lesson data as its chapter. Answers begin in the next section.

Chapter 1

1.1 *mā má mǎ mà — one syllable, four words*

How many marked tones does Mandarin have, not counting the neutral one? Type the number as a word.

1.2 你 — “you”, and the first character

Type the Mandarin word, in pinyin with its tone mark, that means ‘you’ (one person).

1.3 好 — “good”, and what replaces etymology here

好 is built from two components. Type the meaning of the one on the left.

1.4 你好 — the greeting, assembled from two things you already have

You have just been introduced to someone. Type the Mandarin greeting in characters.

1.5 *nǐ hǎo — why the greeting is not said the way it is written*

A dictionary prints the greeting as nǐ hǎo. Type it in pinyin the way it is actually spoken.

1.6 好 again — proof, on a character you own, that tone is the word

Read in the falling fourth tone, 好 stops meaning ‘good’. Type its meaning with that tone, in English.

1.7 Practice — greet someone, and be greeted back

Someone greets you with 你好. Type your reply in characters.

Chapter 2

2.1 人 — two strokes, and a person walking

How many strokes does the character for ‘person’ have?

2.2 亻 — *the same person, standing sideways*

A character has the narrow upright person component at its left edge. What does that tell you about the word?

2.3 尔 — *a piece that is there for its sound*

When a component is inside a character for its SOUND rather than its meaning, what is it telling you?

2.4 *Putting two pieces together — and reading the result*

In this character, which half points at the MEANING — the left or the right?

2.5 女 — *three strokes, seated*

How many strokes are in the character for 'woman'?

2.6 子 — *three strokes, a child*

What does the three-stroke character with the hooked vertical and a bar across the middle mean?

2.7 *Two pieces again — and a warning about the story*

Does this character have a component that points at its pronunciation?

Chapter 3

3.1 一 — *one stroke, and that is the character*

How many strokes does the character for one have?

3.2 一 — *one, and the number is the strokes*

What is the relationship between the number of strokes in this character and what it means?

3.3 二 — *two bars, and neither is decoration*

In the character for two, which bar is longer — the top or the bottom?

3.4 二 — *two, and a syllable you have met before*

Type the pinyin, with its tone mark, for the number two.

3.5 三 — *three bars, and the pattern's last stand*

In the character for three, which of the three bars is shortest?

3.6 三 — *three, and the end of the easy road*

Do you expect the character for four to have four strokes? Why or why not?

3.7 四 — *a box, and the rule that governs every box*

Which stroke of the box in the character for four is drawn LAST?

3.8 四 — *four, borrowed for its sound*

Why do some buildings in China have no fourth floor?

3.9 五 — *count the strokes and be wrong*

How many strokes does the character for five have?

3.10 五 — *five, and the run is complete*

Which of the five numbers could you have worked out from their strokes alone?

3.11 Practice — *read the numbers off a wall*

A lift panel reads 一 二 三 五. Which floor number is missing, and why?

Chapter 4

4.1 口 — *the box, on its own*

Which stroke of this box is written last?

4.2 口 — *mouth, and a piece you will meet everywhere*

What does this character mean, and what is it a picture of?

4.3 日 — *one bar inside the box*

Does the middle bar go in before or after the bottom bar?

4.4 日 — *the sun, and the day it measures*

This character means two things. What are they, and why are they the same word?

4.5 不 — *four strokes, all of them separate*

How many times do you lift the pen writing this character?

4.6 不 — *how Mandarin says no*

Mandarin has no single word meaning 'no'. So how do you answer no to a yes-or-no question?

4.7 Practice — *one box, two characters, and a refusal*

Why is 不 worth more than one word of vocabulary?

Chapter 5

5.1 是 — *finish the sun, then build under it*

Which character sits on top of this one, and must be finished first?

5.2 是 — *“is”, and the nearest thing to “yes”*

Mandarin has no separate word for 'yes'. So how do you say it?

5.3 不是 — *“is not”, and the second tone that moves*

不 changes tone before one particular kind of syllable. Which, and what does 不 become?

5.4 Practice — *answering either way*

Mandarin gives you no word for yes and none for no. What does it give you instead?

Chapter 6

6.1 再 — *a bar, a frame, and a line that closes it*

The frame's top, right side and hook are drawn how – as three strokes, or as one?

6.2 见 — *an eye on two legs*

What sits underneath the frame in this character, and where have you seen it before?

6.3 再见 — *the word that says what it means*

Read the goodbye word literally, character by character. What do the two characters say?

6.4 Practice — *a conversation that ends*

You have opened an exchange, answered inside it, and closed it. Which line closes it, in pinyin?

Chapter 7

7.1 早 — *sun on top, one more time*

Which piece of this character is finished before the other, and how many strokes does it take?

7.2 上 — *the same rule, read the other way*

Which stroke of this character is drawn first, and why is it not the short bar?

7.3 早上 — *morning, and a syllable that goes light*

In the pinyin for 'morning', why does the second syllable have no tone mark?

7.4 早上好 — *the greeting was a pattern all along*

Both greetings you now know end in the same character. Which one, and what does it mean on its own?

7.5 Practice — *greeting the time of day*

You meet someone at eight in the morning. You know two greetings that would both be understood. Which one fits the hour?

Chapter 8

8.1 我 — *seven strokes, and an honest admission*

Which stroke of this seven-stroke character is written last?

8.2 我 — *I, me, and saying who you are*

English has two words, 'I' and 'me', and picks between them. How many does Mandarin use?

8.3 名 — *a mouth with something above it*

Which character that you have already written forms the bottom half of this one?

8.4 字 — *a child under a roof*

This character is the word for the thing you have been writing all along. What does it mean?

8.5 名字 — *the word for a name*

The word for 'name' is made of two characters. What does the second one mean on its own?

8.6 Practice — *saying who you are*

In pinyin, what two words do you put in front of your own name to introduce yourself?

Chapter 9

9.1 什 — *both halves are old news*

Name the two pieces of this character, left first.

9.2 么 — *three strokes, and one of them turns*

The middle stroke goes down-left and then sweeps right. Is that one stroke or two?

9.3 什么 — *what*

Every earlier expression in this book gave something to the listener. What does this word do instead?

9.4 Practice — *when you did not catch it*

You did not catch what someone just said. In pinyin, what one word gets it repeated?

Chapter 10

10.1 讠 — *the speech radical*

A character has this component at its left edge. What can you guess about the word?

10.2 谢 — *twelve strokes, and three pieces*

How many pieces does this twelve-stroke character break into, and which one do you write first?

10.3 谢谢 — *said twice*

The two halves of this word are the same character. Are they said the same way?

10.4 不谢 — *answering thanks*

Why is it said *bú xiè* and not *bù xiè*?

10.5 Practice — thanks, and the answer

This chapter taught you both how to thank someone and how to answer being thanked. How many new characters did that take?

Chapter 11**11.1 请 — a half that tells you the sound**

One half of this character tells you the meaning. What does the other half tell you?

11.2 请 — please, and after you

You hold a door open for someone and say this one word. What are you telling them?

11.3 Practice — after you

A character can give you two different kinds of hint at once. What are they?

Chapter 12**12.1 人 — a person**

Type the Mandarin character for person.

12.2 女 — female, woman

Which taught character is the Level 1 word female or woman?

12.3 儿 — son

What does 儿 mean?

12.4 儿 — fall, then bend and hook

Write the first character of 儿.

12.5 儿子 — son on the page

Write son in Chinese characters.

12.6 儿 — daughter

What does 儿 mean?

12.7 女儿 — daughter on the page

Write daughter in Chinese characters.

12.8 家 — home, family

What two closely linked meanings does 家 carry?

12.9 家 — roof first, body second

Which taught component must be completed first when writing 家?

12.10 家 — home on the page

Write home or family in one Chinese character.

12.11 *Hear jiārén — family members*

What does jiārén mean?

12.12 家人 — *the people of the home*

Write family members in Chinese characters.

12.13 *Retrieve six people and family words*

Write son, daughter, and family members in that order.

12.14 *Payoff — six family words in four skills*

After all four checks pass, write home, person, and family members.

Chapter 13

13.1 *Hear dà — big*

What does dà mean?

13.2 大 — *one bar, two falls*

Which stroke comes first in 大?

13.3 大 — *big on the page*

Write dà, big, in Chinese.

13.4 *Hear dàjiā — everyone*

What does dàjiā mean?

13.5 大家 — *everyone on the page*

Write everyone in Chinese characters.

13.6 *Hear xué — study, learn*

What does xué mean?

13.7 学 — *top, cover, child*

Which familiar character closes 学 at the bottom?

13.8 学 — *study on the page*

Write xué, study or learn, in Chinese.

13.9 *Hear xuésheng — student*

What does xuésheng mean?

13.10 生 — *five measured strokes*

Which stroke closes 生?

13.11 学生 — *student on the page*

Write student in Chinese characters.

13.12 *Hear dàxué — university*

What does dàxué mean?

13.13 大学 — *university on the page*

Write university in Chinese characters.

13.14 *Hear dàxuésheng — university student*

What does dàxuésheng mean?

13.15 *大学生 — university student on the page*

Write university student in Chinese characters.

13.16 *Retrieve six size and school words*

Write student, university, and university student in that order.

13.17 *Payoff — six school words in four skills*

After all four checks pass, write everyone, university, and university student.

Chapter 14

14.1 *Hear xiǎo — small*

What does xiǎo mean?

14.2 *小 — centre, left, right*

Which stroke comes first in 小?

14.3 *小 — small on the page*

Write xiǎo, small, in Chinese.

14.4 *Hear xiǎoxué — primary school*

What does xiǎoxué mean?

14.5 *小学 — primary school on the page*

Write primary school in Chinese characters.

14.6 *Hear xiǎoxuésheng — primary-school student*

What does xiǎoxuésheng mean?

14.7 *小学生 — primary-school student on the page*

Write primary-school student in Chinese characters.

14.8 *Retrieve three primary-school words*

Write small, primary school, and primary-school student in that order.

14.9 *Payoff — three primary-school words in four skills*

After all four checks pass, write primary school and primary-school student.

Chapter 15

15.1 *Hear zhōng — middle*

What does zhōng mean?

15.2 *中 — close, then pass through*

What happens immediately before the final centre line in 中?

15.3 中 — *middle on the page*

Write zhōng, middle, in Chinese.

15.4 Hear zhōngxué — *middle school*

What does zhōngxué mean?

15.5 中学 — *middle school on the page*

Write middle school in Chinese characters.

15.6 Retrieval 1 — *middle and middle school*

Write middle and middle school in that order.

15.7 Hear zhōngxuésheng — *middle-school student*

What does zhōngxuésheng mean?

15.8 中学生 — *middle-school student on the page*

Write middle-school student in Chinese characters.

15.9 Hear tóngxué — *classmate*

What does tóngxué mean?

15.10 同 — *frame, line, box*

What three-stroke shape finishes 同?

15.11 同学 — *classmate on the page*

Write classmate in Chinese characters.

15.12 Retrieval 2 — *school and people*

Write middle school, middle-school student, and classmate.

15.13 Hear shàngxué — *go to school*

What does shàngxué mean?

15.14 上学 — *go to school on the page*

Write go to school in Chinese characters.

15.15 Retrieval 3 — *place, person, classmate, action*

Write middle school, middle-school student, classmate, and go to school.

15.16 Retrieval 4 — *the full school ladder*

Write primary school, middle school, and university in that order.

15.17 Payoff — *four school compounds in four skills*

After all four checks pass, write middle school, classmate, and go to school.

Chapter 16

16.1 Hear zì — *a written character*

What does zì mean on its own?

16.2 字 — *the familiar shape stands alone*

Write zì, a written character, in Chinese.

16.3 *Hear hàn zì — Chinese character*

What does hàn zì mean?

16.4 汉 — *watch five strokes*

After the three water strokes in 汉, what are the last two directions?

16.5 汉 — *copy with a five-part cue*

How many strokes and pen lifts does 汉 use?

16.6 汉 — *hold the route briefly*

Write 汉 after the model has been hidden.

16.7 汉字 — *two known routes, one word*

Read 汉字 without pinyin, then give its meaning.

16.8 *Hear hàn yǔ — the Chinese language*

Which spoken word means the Chinese language: hàn zì or hàn yǔ?

16.9 *Retrieval 1 — 字 and 汉字*

Write written character and Chinese character in that order.

16.10 语 — *speech, five, box*

Which part of 语 is written first, and which small shape closes it?

16.11 语 — *copy, then fade*

After covering half the model, which three-part cue rebuilds 语?

16.12 语 — *wait, then write*

Write 语 from memory. Which component should stay narrow?

16.13 汉语 — *the language in writing*

Read 汉语 without pinyin, then give its meaning.

16.14 *Retrieval 2 — character or language?*

Write Chinese character, then Chinese language.

16.15 *Checkpoint — 字, 汉字, 汉语*

Without pinyin, write character, Chinese character, and Chinese language in that order.

Chapter 17

17.1 *Hear zhōng wén — Chinese*

What does zhōng wén mean?

17.2 文 — *watch four open strokes*

Which two directions finish 文?

17.3 文 — *copy with the route visible*

How many strokes and pen lifts does 文 use?

17.4 文 — *wait, then open the two falls*

Write 文 after the model has been hidden.

17.5 中文 — *two known squares*

Read 中文 without pinyin, then give its meaning.

17.6 Longer return — *character or language?*

Write Chinese language, Chinese character, and written character in that order.

17.7 Hear zhōngguó — *China*

Which spoken word means China: zhōngwén or zhōngguó?

17.8 国 — *frame, inside, close*

When is the bottom of 国 closed?

17.9 国 — *copy with the frame open*

How many strokes and pen lifts does 国 use?

17.10 国 — *wait before closing*

Write 国 from memory. What must happen before the final bottom bar?

17.11 中国 — *China in two squares*

Read 中国 without pinyin, then give its meaning.

17.12 Retrieval 1 — *language or country?*

Write Chinese language, then China.

17.13 Longer return — *the older three*

Write written character, Chinese language, and Chinese character in that order.

17.14 Listening score — *five meanings*

Which sound means China: zhōngwén or zhōngguó?

17.15 Reading score — *no pinyin*

Read and distinguish 中文 and 中国 without pinyin.

17.16 Writing score — *from sound, no model*

Without a model, write Chinese language with 中, then China.

17.17 Payoff — *five identity words*

Without pinyin or a model, write character, Chinese character, Chinese language with 汉, Chinese language with 中, and China.

Chapter 18

18.1 Hear kàn — *look or watch*

What does kàn mean?

18.2 看 — *a hand above an eye*

How many strokes does 看 use?

18.3 看 — *copy hand above, eye below*

What familiar shape finishes 看?

18.4 看 — *wait, then recover the eye*

Write 看 after the model has been hidden.

18.5 看 — *the familiar sound meets the shape*

Read 看, give its meaning, then copy it once.

18.6 Hear kànjiàn — *see*

What does kànjiàn mean?

18.7 看见 — *looking reaches seeing*

Write kànjiàn, to see, without pinyin.

18.8 Hear hǎokàn — *good-looking*

What does hǎokàn mean?

18.9 好看 — *good to look at*

Write hǎokàn, good-looking, without pinyin.

18.10 Retrieval 1 — *look, see, or good-looking?*

Write look, see, and good-looking in that order.

18.11 Hear shū — *book*

What does shū mean?

18.12 书 — *two folds, upright, dot*

How many strokes does 书 use?

18.13 书 — *copy the compact route*

What is the final stroke of 书?

18.14 书 — *wait, then place the dot*

Write 书 after the model has been hidden.

18.15 书 — *the sound meets the shape*

Read 书, give its meaning, then write it once.

18.16 Hear kànshū — *read a book*

What does kànshū mean?

18.17 看书 — *look at a book, read*

Write kànshū, read a book, without pinyin.

18.18 Retrieval 2 — *the earlier three return*

Write good-looking, look, and see in that order.

18.19 Retrieval 1 — *book or read a book?*

Write book, then read a book.

18.20 Listening score — *five nearby meanings*

Which sound means read a book: kànjiàn or kànshū?

18.21 Reading score — *no pinyin*

Read 看见 and 看书, then give their meanings.

18.22 *Writing score — sound to Hanzi, no model*

Without a model, write look, see, good-looking, book, and read a book.

18.23 *Payoff — looking and reading*

Without pinyin or a model, write look, see, good-looking, book, and read a book.

Chapter 19

19.1 *Hear ma — the syllable that asks*

Which tone does ma carry?

19.2 吗 — *the mouth, then the horse*

How many strokes does 吗 use, and which half is written first?

19.3 吗 — *copy it, and keep the mouth small*

What is the final stroke of 吗?

19.4 吗 — *wait, then write the bar*

Which half of 吗 is completed first?

19.5 吗 — *the sound meets the shape*

Where in the sentence does 吗 go, and what does it change?

19.6 *Hear nǐ hǎo ma — how are you*

What does nǐ hǎo ma mean?

19.7 你好吗 — *the greeting, asked*

Write how are you, without pinyin.

19.8 *Retrieval 1 — greeting, or question?*

Write hello, then how are you.

19.9 *Hear shì ma — is that so?*

When do you say shì ma?

19.10 是吗 — *checking what you were told*

Write is that so, without pinyin.

19.11 *Hear hǎo bu hǎo — the question with the answer inside it*

What three pieces make hǎo bu hǎo?

19.12 好不好 — *the question that needed no new character*

Name Mandarin's two ways of asking a yes-or-no question.

19.13 *Retrieval 2 — which question was that?*

Which of the three does NOT end in 吗?

19.14 *Listening score — catch the question*

How many of the three did you catch by ear alone?

19.15 *Reading score — no pinyin on the card*

Reading cold, what tells you a sentence is a question?

19.16 Payoff — *the book can ask*

Give your four scores as listening, speaking, reading, writing.

Chapter 20

20.1 六 — *four strokes again, for six this time*

How many strokes does 六 have?

20.2 六 — *six, and the run starts again*

Which earlier number shares liu's tone?

20.3 七 — *two strokes, for seven*

How many times do you lift the pen writing 七?

20.4 七 — *seven*

Where is the tongue for the q of qi?

20.5 八 — *a character you have already written twice*

What is the only difference between 八 and 人?

20.6 八 — *eight, and why it costs more*

Why is eight a lucky number in Chinese?

20.7 九 — *two strokes again*

How many strokes do 七, 八 and 九 have between them?

20.8 九 — *nine*

Which tone does jiu share with ni, hao and wu?

20.9 十 — *the character that was already here*

Which character you already write has 十 inside it?

20.10 十 — *ten*

Which tone is shi, and is any other number on it?

20.11 Payoff — *one to ten*

Count aloud from one to ten in Mandarin.

Chapter 21

21.1 十一 — *eleven, and the teens in one line*

Build seventeen from shi and qi.

21.2 二十 — *twenty, and ninety-nine numbers from ten words*

What is the difference between shiyi and ershi?

21.3 百 — *a hundred, on a box you have built before*

Which stroke of 百 comes last?

21.4 一百 — *a hundred, and 一 moves*

Is the 一 in yibai said on the same tone as 一 counted alone?

21.5 5 and 五 — *the same number, two registers*

A Chinese price tag says 20. How do you say it aloud?

21.6 Payoff — *ninety-nine numbers, and the price tag*

Say sixty-eight and ninety-nine in Mandarin.

21.7 Close the numeral slice

Write ten and a hundred in characters.

Chapter 29

29.1 (reading) — *six characters, nothing said first*

Which character is a book?

29.2 (reading) — *six words, not six characters*

Which is the person who reads?

29.3 (reading) — *the first passage*

How old is the writer?

Answer Key

The first response is the canonical display answer. When a question accepts other authored forms, they appear underneath.

Chapter 1

1.1 *mā má mǎ mà — one syllable, four words*

Answer: four

Also accepted: 4

1.2 你 — “you”, and the first character

Answer: nǐ

Also accepted: ni3; ni

1.3 好 — “good”, and what replaces etymology here

Answer: woman

Also accepted: female; 女

1.4 你好 — the greeting, assembled from two things you already have

Answer: 你好

Also accepted: ni hao; nǐ hǎo; ní hǎo; nihao

1.5 ní hǎo — why the greeting is not said the way it is written

Answer: ní hǎo

Also accepted: ni2 hao3; nihao (ní hǎo); ní hao

1.6 好 again — proof, on a character you own, that tone is the word

Answer: to be fond of

Also accepted: to like; like; fond of; be fond of

1.7 Practice — greet someone, and be greeted back

Answer: 你好

Also accepted: ni hao; nǐ hǎo; ní hǎo; nihao

Chapter 2

2.1 人 — *two strokes, and a person walking*

Answer: 2

Also accepted: two; 2 strokes; two strokes

2.2 亻 — *the same person, standing sideways*

Answer: it is about a person

Also accepted: person; about a person; it involves a person; people

2.3 尔 — *a piece that is there for its sound*

Answer: roughly how the word is pronounced

Also accepted: the pronunciation; how it sounds; the sound; how to say it

2.4 Putting two pieces together — *and reading the result*

Answer: the left

Also accepted: left; left half; the left half

2.5 女 — *three strokes, seated*

Answer: 3

Also accepted: three; 3 strokes; three strokes

2.6 子 — *three strokes, a child*

Answer: child

Also accepted: a child; baby; kid; child, zi

2.7 Two pieces again — *and a warning about the story*

Answer: no

Also accepted: none; neither; no it does not

Chapter 3

3.1 一 — *one stroke, and that is the character*

Answer: 1

Also accepted: one; 1 stroke; one stroke

3.2 一 — *one, and the number is the strokes*

Answer: they are the same

Also accepted: they are the same number; one stroke means one; the same; stroke count equals the number; they match

3.3 二 — *two bars, and neither is decoration*

Answer: the bottom

Also accepted: bottom; lower; the lower one; bottom bar

3.4 二 — *two, and a syllable you have met before*

Answer: èr

Also accepted: er4; er

3.5 三 — *three bars, and the pattern's last stand*

Answer: the middle one

Also accepted: middle; the middle; middle bar; the middle bar; 2nd; second

3.6 三 — *three, and the end of the easy road***Answer:** no**Also accepted:** four bars would be unreadable; you would have to count it; stacked bars stop being readable**3.7 四** — *a box, and the rule that governs every box***Answer:** the bottom**Also accepted:** bottom; the bottom bar; bottom bar; closing the bottom; the closing bottom stroke**3.8 四** — *four, borrowed for its sound***Answer:** si sounds like the word for die**Also accepted:** because si sounds like die; four sounds like death; si and si differ only by tone; it sounds like the word for death**3.9 五** — *count the strokes and be wrong***Answer:** 4**Also accepted:** four; 4 strokes; four strokes**3.10 五** — *five, and the run is complete***Answer:** one two and three**Also accepted:** 1 2 3; one, two, three; the first three; 一 二 三; yi er san**3.11 Practice** — *read the numbers off a wall***Answer:** four**Also accepted:** 4; 四; four, because si sounds like the word for die; four - sounds like die; 4 - unlucky

Chapter 4

4.1 口 — *the box, on its own***Answer:** the bottom**Also accepted:** bottom; the bottom bar; bottom bar; closing the bottom**4.2 口** — *mouth, and a piece you will meet everywhere***Answer:** mouth**Also accepted:** a mouth; an open mouth; mouth - it is a picture of one**4.3 日** — *one bar inside the box***Answer:** before**Also accepted:** before it; before the bottom; the middle comes first**4.4 日** — *the sun, and the day it measures***Answer:** sun and day**Also accepted:** sun and day - the sun measures the day; sun, day; the sun and the day it counts**4.5 丌** — *four strokes, all of them separate***Answer:** 3**Also accepted:** three; 3 times; three times

4.6 不 — *how Mandarin says no*

Answer: negate the word they asked about

Also accepted: by negating the verb; put bu in front of the word; negate what was asked; say bu plus the word

4.7 Practice — *one box, two characters, and a refusal*

Answer: it negates every word you know

Also accepted: it doubles your vocabulary; it turns any word into its opposite; every word gets a negative

Chapter 5

5.1 是 — *finish the sun, then build under it*

Answer: the sun character

Also accepted: 日; ri; the sun; sun

5.2 是 — *“is”, and the nearest thing to “yes”*

Answer: echo the word back

Also accepted: repeat it; say it again; echo the word you were asked about

5.3 不是 — *“is not”, and the second tone that moves*

Answer: before a fourth tone it becomes rising

Also accepted: before a falling tone, it rises; before 4th tone it becomes 2nd; it becomes second tone before a fourth tone; rising, before a fourth tone

5.4 Practice — *answering either way*

Answer: a word you keep or turn

Also accepted: the word, kept or negated; you echo it or negate it; one word and two things to do with it

Chapter 6

6.1 再 — *a bar, a frame, and a line that closes it*

Answer: one

Also accepted: as one; one stroke; 1; a single stroke; one turning stroke

6.2 见 — *an eye on two legs*

Answer: legs, from the person character

Also accepted: the legs of ren; two legs; the legs from 人; legs; 人

6.3 再见 — *the word that says what it means*

Answer: again see

Also accepted: see again; again, see; zai jian = again see; again + see

6.4 Practice — *a conversation that ends*

Answer: zàijiàn

Also accepted: zaijian; zai jian; zài jiàn; zaijian4; 再见

Chapter 7

7.1 早 — *sun on top, one more time*

Answer: the sun, four strokes

Also accepted: 日, four; the sun character, 4; 日 first, four strokes; 日 in four

7.2 上 — *the same rule, read the other way*

Answer: the vertical, because the bar does not cross it

Also accepted: vertical; the central vertical; the vertical, the bar meets it; the vertical stroke

7.3 早上 — *morning, and a syllable that goes light*

Answer: it is neutral

Also accepted: neutral tone; it lost its tone; it is unstressed; no tone, it is neutral

7.4 早上好 — *the greeting was a pattern all along*

Answer: 好, good

Also accepted: hao, good; 好 means good; 好 - good; the good character

7.5 Practice — *greeting the time of day*

Answer: 早上好

Also accepted: zaoshang hao; zǎoshang hǎo; zaoshanghao; the morning one; good morning

Chapter 8

8.1 我 — *seven strokes, and an honest admission*

Answer: the dot

Also accepted: dot; the upper right dot; the top right dot; the last dot

8.2 我 — *I, me, and saying who you are*

Answer: one

Also accepted: 1; one word; just one; only one

8.3 名 — *a mouth with something above it*

Answer: 口

Also accepted: kou; the mouth; 口 the mouth; mouth

8.4 字 — *a child under a roof*

Answer: character

Also accepted: a character; written character; chinese character; a written word

8.5 名字 — *the word for a name*

Answer: character

Also accepted: a character; written character; zi means character; a written unit

8.6 Practice — *saying who you are*

Answer: wǒ shì

Also accepted: wo shi; wǒshì; wo3 shi4; 我是

Chapter 9

9.1 什 — *both halves are old news*

Answer: the person radical, then ten

Also accepted: 亻 and 十; person and ten; the person, then ten; ren radical and shi

9.2 么 — *three strokes, and one of them turns*

Answer: one

Also accepted: 1; one stroke; a single stroke; one, unbroken

9.3 什么 — *what*

Answer: it asks

Also accepted: asks; it asks a question; asks for something back; it gets something back

9.4 Practice — *when you did not catch it*

Answer: shénme

Also accepted: shenme; shén me; shen2 me; 什么

Chapter 10

10.1 讠 — *the speech radical*

Answer: it is about speech

Also accepted: speech; it involves speaking; something to do with talking; about talking

10.2 谢 — *twelve strokes, and three pieces*

Answer: three, speech first

Also accepted: three, 讠 first; 3, the speech radical; three pieces, speech first; three - speech, body, inch

10.3 谢谢 — *said twice*

Answer: no

Also accepted: not quite; no, the second is light; no - the second goes neutral; they differ

10.4 不谢 — *answering thanks*

Answer: because 谢 is fourth tone

Also accepted: 谢 is fourth tone; bu rises before a fourth tone; the following tone is falling; because of the fourth tone after it

10.5 Practice — *thanks, and the answer*

Answer: one

Also accepted: 1; just one; one character; a single character

Chapter 11

11.1 请 — *a half that tells you the sound*

Answer: the sound

Also accepted: how to say it; the pronunciation; roughly how it sounds; the sound of the word

11.2 请 — *please, and after you*

Answer: go ahead

Also accepted: after you; please, go ahead; be my guest; I invite you to go first

11.3 Practice — *after you*

Answer: meaning and sound

Also accepted: what it means and how it sounds; meaning and pronunciation; sound and meaning; one for meaning, one for sound

Chapter 12

12.1 人 — *a person*

Answer: 人

Also accepted: 人 rén

12.2 女 — *female, woman*

Answer: 女

Also accepted: 女 nǚ

12.3 儿 — *son*

Answer: son

Also accepted: a son

12.4 儿 — *fall, then bend and hook*

Answer: 儿

Also accepted: 儿 ér

12.5 儿子 — *son on the page*

Answer: 儿子

Also accepted: 儿子 érzi

12.6 女儿 — *daughter*

Answer: daughter

Also accepted: a daughter

12.7 女儿 — *daughter on the page*

Answer: 女儿

Also accepted: 女儿 nǚ'ér

12.8 家 — *home, family*

Answer: home and family

Also accepted: family and home; home; family; household and home

12.9 家 — *roof first, body second*

Answer: 宀

Also accepted: the roof; roof; 宀 roof

12.10 家 — *home on the page*

Answer: 家

Also accepted: 家 jiā

12.11 Hear jiārén — *family members*

Answer: family members

Also accepted: family; the people in a family; members of the family

12.12 家人 — *the people of the home*

Answer: 家人

Also accepted: 家人 jiārén

12.13 Retrieve six people and family words

Answer: 儿子 — 女儿 — 家人

Also accepted: 儿子 女儿 家人; 儿子, 女儿, 家人

12.14 Payoff — *six family words in four skills*

Answer: 家 — 人 — 家人

Also accepted: 家 人 家人; 家, 人, 家人

Chapter 13

13.1 Hear dà — *big*

Answer: big

Also accepted: large; big or large

13.2 大 — *one bar, two falls*

Answer: the horizontal stroke

Also accepted: horizontal; 一; the bar

13.3 大 — *big on the page*

Answer: 大

Also accepted: 大 dà

13.4 Hear dàjiā — *everyone*

Answer: everyone

Also accepted: everybody

13.5 大家 — *everyone on the page*

Answer: 大家

Also accepted: 大家 dàjiā

13.6 Hear xué — *study, learn*

Answer: study

Also accepted: learn; study or learn; to study; to learn

13.7 学 — *top, cover, child*

Answer: 子

Also accepted: 子 zi; child 子

13.8 学 — *study on the page*

Answer: 学

Also accepted: 学 xué

13.9 Hear xuésheng — *student*

Answer: student

Also accepted: a student

13.10 生 — *five measured strokes*

Answer: the long bottom horizontal

Also accepted: bottom horizontal; the bottom bar; horizontal

13.11 学生 — *student on the page*

Answer: 学生

Also accepted: 学生 xuésheng

13.12 Hear dàxué — *university*

Answer: university

Also accepted: college; university or college

13.13 大学 — *university on the page*

Answer: 大学

Also accepted: 大学 dàxué

13.14 Hear dàxuésheng — *university student*

Answer: university student

Also accepted: college student; a university student; a college student

13.15 大学生 — *university student on the page*

Answer: 大学生

Also accepted: 大学生 dàxuésheng

13.16 Retrieve six size and school words

Answer: 学生 — 大学 — 大学生

Also accepted: 学生 大学 大学生; 学生, 大学, 大学生

13.17 Payoff — *six school words in four skills*

Answer: 大家 — 大学 — 大学生

Also accepted: 大家 大学 大学生; 大家, 大学, 大学生

Chapter 14

14.1 Hear xiǎo — *small*

Answer: small

Also accepted: little; small or little

14.2 小 — *centre, left, right***Answer:** the centre vertical hook**Also accepted:** centre vertical; vertical hook; middle stroke**14.3** 小 — *small on the page***Answer:** 小**Also accepted:** 小 xiǎo**14.4** Hear xiǎoxué — *primary school***Answer:** primary school**Also accepted:** elementary school; primary or elementary school**14.5** 小学 — *primary school on the page***Answer:** 小学**Also accepted:** 小学 xiǎoxué**14.6** Hear xiǎoxuésheng — *primary-school student***Answer:** primary-school student**Also accepted:** elementary-school student; a primary school student; an elementary school student**14.7** 小学生 — *primary-school student on the page***Answer:** 小学生**Also accepted:** 小学生 xiǎoxuésheng**14.8** Retrieve three primary-school words**Answer:** 小 — 小学 — 小学生**Also accepted:** 小 小学 小学生; 小, 小学, 小学生**14.9** Payoff — *three primary-school words in four skills***Answer:** 小学 — 小学生**Also accepted:** 小学 小学生; 小学, 小学生

Chapter 15

15.1 Hear zhōng — *middle***Answer:** middle**Also accepted:** centre; center; middle or centre**15.2** 中 — *close, then pass through***Answer:** close the box**Also accepted:** the box closes; draw the bottom horizontal; close 口**15.3** 中 — *middle on the page***Answer:** 中**Also accepted:** 中 zhōng**15.4** Hear zhōngxué — *middle school***Answer:** middle school**Also accepted:** a middle school

15.5 中学 — *middle school on the page***Answer:** 中学**Also accepted:** 中学 zhōngxué**15.6 Retrieval 1** — *middle and middle school***Answer:** 中 — 中学**Also accepted:** 中 中学; 中, 中学**15.7 Hear zhōngxuésheng** — *middle-school student***Answer:** middle-school student**Also accepted:** a middle school student; middle school student**15.8 中学生** — *middle-school student on the page***Answer:** 中学生**Also accepted:** 中学生 zhōngxuésheng**15.9 Hear tóngxué** — *classmate***Answer:** classmate**Also accepted:** schoolmate; a classmate; a schoolmate**15.10 同** — *frame, line, box***Answer:** 口**Also accepted:** the inner 口; mouth box; a box**15.11 同学** — *classmate on the page***Answer:** 同学**Also accepted:** 同学 tóngxué**15.12 Retrieval 2** — *school and people***Answer:** 中学 — 中学生 — 同学**Also accepted:** 中学 中学生 同学; 中学, 中学生, 同学**15.13 Hear shàngxué** — *go to school***Answer:** go to school**Also accepted:** attend school; to go to school; to attend school**15.14 上学** — *go to school on the page***Answer:** 上学**Also accepted:** 上学 shàngxué**15.15 Retrieval 3** — *place, person, classmate, action***Answer:** 中学 — 中学生 — 同学 — 上学**Also accepted:** 中学 中学生 同学 上学; 中学, 中学生, 同学, 上学**15.16 Retrieval 4** — *the full school ladder***Answer:** 小学 — 中学 — 大学**Also accepted:** 小学 中学 大学; 小学, 中学, 大学**15.17 Payoff** — *four school compounds in four skills***Answer:** 中学 — 同学 — 上学**Also accepted:** 中学 同学 上学; 中学, 同学, 上学

Chapter 16

16.1 Hear zì — a written character

Answer: a written Chinese character

Also accepted: character; written character; Chinese character

16.2 字 — the familiar shape stands alone

Answer: 字

Also accepted: 字 zì

16.3 Hear hànzi — Chinese character

Answer: Chinese character

Also accepted: a Chinese character; Han character; a Han character

16.4 ㄣ — watch five strokes

Answer: turn down-left, then fall down-right

Also accepted: left then right; down-left then down-right; turn left and fall right

16.5 ㄣ — copy with a five-part cue

Answer: five strokes and four lifts

Also accepted: 5 strokes, 4 lifts; five and four

16.6 ㄣ — hold the route briefly

Answer: ㄣ

Also accepted: ㄣ hàn

16.7 汉字 — two known routes, one word

Answer: hànzi — Chinese character

Also accepted: hanzi, Chinese character; Chinese character; hànzi

16.8 Hear hànyǔ — the Chinese language

Answer: hànyǔ

Also accepted: hanyu; hànyǔ means Chinese language

16.9 Retrieval 1 — 字 and 汉字

Answer: 字 — 汉字

Also accepted: 字 汉字; 字, 汉字

16.10 语 — speech, five, box

Answer: 讠 first; 口 closes it

Also accepted: speech radical then box; 讠 then 口; yan first and kou last

16.11 语 — copy, then fade

Answer: speech, five, box

Also accepted: 讠 五 口; yan five kou; speech five mouth

16.12 语 — wait, then write

Answer: 讠

Also accepted: speech radical; the left side; yan

16.13 汉语 — the language in writing

Answer: hànyǔ — the Chinese language

Also accepted: hanyu, Chinese language; Chinese language; hànyǔ

16.14 *Retrieval 2 — character or language?***Answer:** 汉字 — 汉语**Also accepted:** 汉字 汉语; 汉字, 汉语**16.15** *Checkpoint — 字, 汉字, 汉语***Answer:** 字 — 汉字 — 汉语**Also accepted:** 字 汉字 汉语; 字, 汉字, 汉语

Chapter 17

17.1 *Hear zhōngwén — Chinese***Answer:** Chinese; the Chinese language**Also accepted:** Chinese; Chinese language; the Chinese language**17.2** *文 — watch four open strokes***Answer:** fall left, then fall right**Also accepted:** left then right; down-left then down-right; left-falling then right-falling**17.3** *文 — copy with the route visible***Answer:** four strokes and three lifts**Also accepted:** 4 strokes, 3 lifts; four and three**17.4** *文 — wait, then open the two falls***Answer:** 文**Also accepted:** 文 wén**17.5** *中文 — two known squares***Answer:** zhōngwén — Chinese; the Chinese language**Also accepted:** Chinese; Chinese language; zhongwen; zhōngwén**17.6** *Longer return — character or language?***Answer:** 汉语 — 汉字 — 字**Also accepted:** 汉语 汉字 字; 汉语, 汉字, 字**17.7** *Hear zhōngguó — China***Answer:** zhōngguó**Also accepted:** zhongguo; zhōngguó means China**17.8** *国 — frame, inside, close***Answer:** after every stroke of 玉 inside is finished**Also accepted:** last; after the inside; after 玉; after the inner dot**17.9** *国 — copy with the frame open***Answer:** eight strokes and seven lifts**Also accepted:** 8 strokes, 7 lifts; eight and seven**17.10** *国 — wait before closing***Answer:** finish 玉 inside**Also accepted:** finish the inside; write 玉; complete all inner strokes

17.11 中国 — *China in two squares***Answer:** zhōngguó — China**Also accepted:** China; zhongguo; zhōngguó**17.12 Retrieval 1 — *language or country?*****Answer:** 中文 — 中国**Also accepted:** 中文 中国; 中文, 中国**17.13 Longer return — *the older three*****Answer:** 字 — 汉语 — 汉字**Also accepted:** 字 汉语 汉字; 字, 汉语, 汉字**17.14 Listening score — *five meanings*****Answer:** zhōngguó**Also accepted:** zhongguo; zhōngguó means China**17.15 Reading score — *no pinyin*****Answer:** 中文 — Chinese language; 中国 — China**Also accepted:** 中文 Chinese, 中国 China; Chinese language; China**17.16 Writing score — *from sound, no model*****Answer:** 中文 — 中国**Also accepted:** 中文 中国; 中文, 中国**17.17 Payoff — *five identity words*****Answer:** 字 — 汉字 — 汉语 — 中文 — 中国**Also accepted:** 字 汉字 汉语 中文 中国; 字, 汉字, 汉语, 中文, 中国

Chapter 18

18.1 Hear kàn — *look or watch***Answer:** look at or watch**Also accepted:** look; look at; watch; to look at; to watch**18.2 看 — *a hand above an eye*****Answer:** nine**Also accepted:** 9; nine strokes**18.3 看 — *copy hand above, eye below*****Answer:** 目, the eye shape**Also accepted:** 目; eye; the eye component; mu**18.4 看 — *wait, then recover the eye*****Answer:** 看**Also accepted:** 看 kàn**18.5 看 — *the familiar sound meets the shape*****Answer:** kàn — look at or watch — 看**Also accepted:** kan look watch 看; kàn look at 看; kàn watch 看**18.6 Hear kànjiàn — *see*****Answer:** see or catch sight of**Also accepted:** see; to see; catch sight of

18.7 看见 — *looking reaches seeing*

Answer: 看见

Also accepted: 看见 kànjiàn

18.8 Hear hǎokàn — *good-looking*

Answer: good-looking or nice to look at

Also accepted: good-looking; good looking; nice to look at; pretty

18.9 好看 — *good to look at*

Answer: 好看

Also accepted: 好看 hǎokàn

18.10 Retrieval 1 — *look, see, or good-looking?*

Answer: 看 — 看见 — 好看

Also accepted: 看 看见 好看; 看, 看见, 好看

18.11 Hear shū — *book*

Answer: book

Also accepted: a book

18.12 书 — *two folds, upright, dot*

Answer: four

Also accepted: 4; four strokes

18.13 书 — *copy the compact route*

Answer: the dot at the upper right

Also accepted: dot; the dot; upper-right dot

18.14 书 — *wait, then place the dot*

Answer: 书

Also accepted: 书 shū

18.15 书 — *the sound meets the shape*

Answer: shū — book — 书

Also accepted: shu book 书; shū book 书

18.16 Hear kànshū — *read a book*

Answer: read a book or read books

Also accepted: read; read a book; read books; to read

18.17 看书 — *look at a book, read*

Answer: 看书

Also accepted: 看书 kànshū

18.18 Retrieval 2 — *the earlier three return*

Answer: 好看 — 看 — 看见

Also accepted: 好看 看 看见; 好看, 看, 看见

18.19 Retrieval 1 — *book or read a book?*

Answer: 书 — 看书

Also accepted: 书 看书; 书, 看书

18.20 Listening score — *five nearby meanings*

Answer: kànshū

Also accepted: kànshu; kànshū means read a book

18.21 *Reading score — no pinyin***Answer:** kànjiàn — see; kànshū — read a book**Also accepted:** see; read a book; kànjiàn see, kànshū read; 看见 see 看书 read**18.22** *Writing score — sound to Hanzi, no model***Answer:** 看 — 看见 — 好看 — 书 — 看书**Also accepted:** 看 看见 好看 书 看书; 看, 看见, 好看, 书, 看书**18.23** *Payoff — looking and reading***Answer:** 看 — 看见 — 好看 — 书 — 看书**Also accepted:** 看 看见 好看 书 看书; 看, 看见, 好看, 书, 看书

Chapter 19

19.1 *Hear ma — the syllable that asks***Answer:** none — it is neutral**Also accepted:** none; neutral; no tone; neutral tone**19.2** 吗 — *the mouth, then the horse***Answer:** six, and the left 𠃍 is written first**Also accepted:** six left; 6 left; six, 𠃍 first; 6, kou first**19.3** 吗 — *copy it, and keep the mouth small***Answer:** the long horizontal across the right half**Also accepted:** the long horizontal; long bar; the wide horizontal; horizontal**19.4** 吗 — *wait, then write the bar***Answer:** the left 𠃍**Also accepted:** left; 𠃍; the mouth; kou; the left half**19.5** 吗 — *the sound meets the shape***Answer:** at the end, and it turns the statement into a yes-or-no question**Also accepted:** at the end; end, makes it a question; at the end - question**19.6** *Hear nǐ hǎo ma — how are you***Answer:** how are you**Also accepted:** how are you?; are you well**19.7** 你好吗 — *the greeting, asked***Answer:** 你好吗**Also accepted:** 你好吗 nǐ hǎo ma; nǐ hao ma 你好吗**19.8** *Retrieval 1 — greeting, or question?***Answer:** 你好 — 你好吗**Also accepted:** 你好 你好吗; 你好, 你好吗**19.9** *Hear shì ma — is that so?***Answer:** after somebody tells you something, to check it and invite them to go on**Also accepted:** to check what you were told; really; is that so; to show you heard**19.10** 是吗 — *checking what you were told***Answer:** 是吗**Also accepted:** 是吗 shì ma; shì ma 是吗

19.11 *Hear* 好不好 — *the question with the answer inside it*

Answer: good, not, good

Also accepted: good not good; hao bu hao; the word, its negative, the word again

19.12 好不好 — *the question that needed no new character*

Answer: put 吗 at the end, or say the word, 不, and the word again

Also accepted: ma at the end and verb-not-verb; 吗 or 不; ma, or the word not the word

19.13 *Retrieval 2* — *which question was that?*

Answer: 好不好

Also accepted: 好不好 hǎo bu hǎo; hao bu hao; the good-not-good one

19.14 *Listening score* — *catch the question*

Answer: three of three

Also accepted: 3; 3/3; three; two; 2; one; 1; zero; 0

19.15 *Reading score* — *no pinyin on the card*

Answer: a 吗 at the end, or a word repeated around 不

Also accepted: 吗 at the end or 不 in the middle; ma or bu; the last character, or the repetition

19.16 *Payoff* — *the book can ask*

Answer: four separate numbers out of four

Also accepted: 4 4 4 4; 4/4 4/4 4/4 4/4; three four four three; 3 4 4 3

Chapter 20

20.1 六 — *four strokes again, for six this time*

Answer: four

Also accepted: 4; four strokes

20.2 六 — *six, and the run starts again*

Answer: sì

Also accepted: 四; sì, four; four

20.3 七 — *two strokes, for seven*

Answer: once

Also accepted: 1; one; once, after the horizontal

20.4 七 — *seven*

Answer: where it is for y in yes

Also accepted: like y; the y position; front, as for y

20.5 八 — *a character you have already written twice*

Answer: the strokes are parted at the top

Also accepted: they do not touch; the gap at the top; 人 joins, 八 does not

20.6 八 — *eight, and why it costs more*

Answer: it sounds like fa, to prosper

Also accepted: it sounds like the word for prosper; fa; sounds like getting rich

20.7 九 — *two strokes again*

Answer: six

Also accepted: 6; six, two each

20.8 九 — *nine*

Answer: third

Also accepted: 3; tone 3; the third, the dip

20.9 十 — *the character that was already here*

Answer: 早

Also accepted: zao; 早, morning; morning

20.10 十 — *ten*

Answer: second, and no

Also accepted: second tone, no others; 2, none; the rise, and it is the only one

20.11 Payoff — *one to ten*

Answer: yī èr sān sì wǔ liù qī bā jiǔ shí

Also accepted: yi er san si wu liu qi ba jiu shi; yī, èr, sān, sì, wǔ, liù, qī, bā, jiǔ, shí

Chapter 21

21.1 十一 — *eleven, and the teens in one line*

Answer: shíqī

Also accepted: shiqi; 十七; shí qī

21.2 二十 — *twenty, and ninety-nine numbers from ten words*

Answer: the order

Also accepted: the order of the two words; ten-one versus two-ten; which comes first

21.3 百 — *a hundred, on a box you have built before*

Answer: the bottom horizontal

Also accepted: the floor; the closing bottom bar; the bottom bar

21.4 一百 — *a hundred, and 一 moves*

Answer: no

Also accepted: no, it falls; no — it becomes a fall; it falls

21.5 5 and 五 — *the same number, two registers*

Answer: èrshí

Also accepted: ershi; 二十; er shi

21.6 Payoff — *ninety-nine numbers, and the price tag*

Answer: liùshíbā jiùshíjiǔ

Also accepted: liushiba jiushijiu; liùshíbā, jiùshíjiǔ; liushiba, jiushijiu

21.7 Close the numeral slice

Answer: 十 百

Also accepted: 十, 百; 十百

Chapter 29

29.1 (*reading*) — *six characters, nothing said first*

Answer: shu

Also accepted: 书; shū

29.2 (*reading*) — *six words, not six characters*

Answer: kan shu de ren

Also accepted: 看书的人; the reader

29.3 (*reading*) — *the first passage*

Answer: 18

Also accepted: 十八; eighteen

Sources for this starter edition

Character shapes, components, and stroke order follow this project's curated character inventory, whose stroke orders are marked authoritative because Chinese stroke order is a standardised taught system rather than a convention. Codepoint and glyph references are to the Unicode CJK Unified Ideographs chart.

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Look up an English meaning, a dedicated language topic, or a chapter topic. Each linked reference opens the chapter where the material is introduced; the focus labels name only explicitly typed lesson sections.

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a hundred — and the one word in the run whose tone moves 一百 (yìbǎi)

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 21, p. 177

A wider school map

chapter topic; Chapter 15, p. 117

a written Chinese character, recovered without pinyin 字 (zì)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 16, p. 125

After You

chapter topic; Chapter 11, p. 87

Age, and And

chapter topic; Chapter 27, p. 227

Asking

chapter topic; Chapter 19, p. 155

asking what somebody likes, out of four words the book already

had 你喜欢什么 (nǐ xǐhuan shénme)

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B

big; large, now read and written 大 (dà)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 13, p. 101

book, recovered without pinyin 书 (shū)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 18, p. 143

C

Character or language?

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China 中国 (zhōngguó)

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Chinese character; Han character 汉字 (hànzì)

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classmate; schoolmate, now read and written 同学 (tóngxué)

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D

daughter, now read and written 女儿 (nǚ'ér)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 12, p. 93

De — The Hinge

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**de — the particle that puts an owner in front of what is owned,
and carries no tone** 的 (de)

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 23, p. 193

**duì — 'right', and on its own the commonest way to agree in
spoken Mandarin** 对 (duì)

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E

**eight — first tone, and the luckiest number in the
language** 八 (bā)

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**eleven — ten one, and the teens are finished in a
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everyone, built from known characters 大家 (dàjiā)

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F

family members, now read and written 家人 (jiārén)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 12, p. 93

female; woman 女 (nǚ)

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five 五 (wǔ)

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four 四 (sì)

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From study to university student

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gè — the measure word, and the fact that a Mandarin number cannot touch a noun without one 个 (gè)

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go to school; attend school, built from known

characters 上学 (shàngxué)

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good-looking or nice to look at 好看 (hǎokàn)

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Good Morning, and a Rule That Declines to Fire

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good morning — and proof that 好 was a building

block 早上好 (zǎoshang hǎo)

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good, well 好 (hǎo)

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goodbye — two characters whose meanings genuinely add

up 再见 (zàijiàn)

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hello (literally “you good”) 你好 (nǐ hǎo)

explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

home or family, now read and written 家 (jiā)

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how are you, written from three characters already

yours 你好吗 (nǐ hǎo ma)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 19, p. 155

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is it good, written from three characters already yours and no new shape at all 好不好 (hǎo bu hǎo)

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is not — and a pitch that moves to get out of the way 不是 (bú shì)

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le after a verb: the event is finished — and this is aspect, not tense 了 (le)

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ní hǎo — why the greeting is not said the way it is written

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two 二 (èr)

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 3, p. 21

Two pieces again — and a warning about the story

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 11

U

university; college, built from known characters 大学 (dàxué)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 13, p. 101

university student, built from known

characters 大学生 (dàxuésheng)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 13, p. 101

W

What?

chapter topic; Chapter 9, p. 73

what — the first question word in this book 什么 (shénme)

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 9, p. 73

Writing score — from sound, no model

script and writing topic; Chapter 17, p. 133

X

**xǐhuan — 'to like', an ordinary verb with an ordinary object, and
no inversion anywhere** 喜欢 (xǐhuan)

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 28, p. 235

Xihuan — What You Like

chapter topic; Chapter 28, p. 235

Y

Yes, No, and a Tone That Moves

chapter topic; Chapter 5, p. 43

you (one person) 你 (nǐ)

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

**you're welcome — real and understood everywhere, though not
the commonest reply, which needs characters this book cannot
yet print** 不谢 (bú xiè)

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 10, p. 79

**yǒu — 'to have', and also 'there is': one verb where Spanish
spends three points** 有 (yǒu)

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 24, p. 201

Other

一 — one stroke, and that is the character

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 3, p. 21

七 — two strokes, for seven

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 20, p. 167

三 — three bars, and the pattern's last stand

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 3, p. 21

上 — the same rule, read the other way

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 7, p. 57

不 — four strokes, all of them separate

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 33

个 — three strokes, and you already write two of them

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 24, p. 201

中 — close, then pass through

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 117

中国人 — a Chinese person, built out of three characters you already write 中国人 (Zhōngguó rén)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 22, p. 185

么 — three strokes, and one of them turns

script and writing topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, script; Chapter 9, p. 73

九 — two strokes again

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 20, p. 167

书 — a book, the book, books

grammar topic; Chapter 22, p. 185

书 — copy the compact route

script and writing topic; Chapter 18, p. 143

书 — two folds, upright, dot

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 18, p. 143

书 — wait, then place the dot

script and writing topic; Chapter 18, p. 143

了 — aspect, and why it is not a tense

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 25, p. 209

了 — two strokes

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 25, p. 209

二 — two bars, and neither is decoration

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 3, p. 21

五 — count the strokes and be wrong

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 3, p. 21

人 — two strokes, and a person walking

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 11

亻 — the same person, standing sideways

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 11

什 — both halves are old news

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 9, p. 73

儿 — fall, then bend and hook

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 12, p. 93

八 — a character you have already written twice

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 20, p. 167

六 — four strokes again, for six this time

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 20, p. 167

再 — a bar, a frame, and a line that closes it

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 6, p. 49

十 — the character that was already here

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 20, p. 167

口 — the box, on its own

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 33

同 — frame, line, box

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 15, p. 117

名 — a mouth with something above it

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 65

吗 — copy it, and keep the mouth small

script and writing topic; Chapter 19, p. 155

吗 — the mouth, then the horse

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 19, p. 155

吗 — wait, then write the bar

script and writing topic; Chapter 19, p. 155

呢 — 吗's shape, a different sound

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 26, p. 217

和 — eight strokes, and the right half is a mouth

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 27, p. 227

喜 — twelve strokes, stacked in four bands

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 28, p. 235

四 — a box, and the rule that governs every box

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 3, p. 21

国 — copy with the frame open

script and writing topic; Chapter 17, p. 133

国 — frame, inside, close

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 17, p. 133

国 — wait before closing

script and writing topic; Chapter 17, p. 133

大 — one bar, two falls

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 13, p. 101

女 — three strokes, seated

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 11

好 again — **proof, on a character you own, that tone is the word**

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

子 — **three strokes, a child**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 11

字 — **a child under a roof**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 65

学 — **top, cover, child**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 13, p. 101

家 — **roof first, body second**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 12, p. 93

对 — **five strokes, and a hand on the left**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 26, p. 217

小 — **centre, left, right**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 14, p. 111

尔 — **a piece that is there for its sound**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 2, p. 11

岁 — **six strokes, and a rule that is not left-to-right**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 27, p. 227

我 — **seven strokes, and an honest admission**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 65

我是 — **nothing agrees with anything**

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 22, p. 185

我是大学生了 — **something has changed**

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 25, p. 209

文 — **copy with the route visible**

script and writing topic; Chapter 17, p. 133

文 — **wait, then open the two falls**

script and writing topic; Chapter 17, p. 133

文 — **watch four open strokes**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 17, p. 133

日 — **one bar inside the box**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 33

早 — **sun on top, one more time**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 7, p. 57

是 — **finish the sun, then build under it**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 5, p. 43

有 — **six strokes, and a moon underneath**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 24, p. 201

欢 — **six strokes, and two of them are already yours**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 28, p. 235

汉 — **copy with a five-part cue**

script and writing topic; Chapter 16, p. 125

汉 — hold the route briefly

script and writing topic; Chapter 16, p. 125

汉 — watch five strokes

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 16, p. 125

汉语 — 我看书: topic first, comment after

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 23, p. 193

生 — five measured strokes

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 13, p. 101

百 — a hundred, on a box you have built before

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 21, p. 177

的 — eight strokes for the commonest character there is

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 23, p. 193

看 — a hand above an eye

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 18, p. 143

看 — copy hand above, eye below

script and writing topic; Chapter 18, p. 143

看 — the verb that never changes

grammar topic; Chapter 22, p. 185

看 — wait, then recover the eye

script and writing topic; Chapter 18, p. 143

看书的人 — the one who reads

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 23, p. 193

见 — an eye on two legs

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 6, p. 49

讠 — the speech radical

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 10, p. 79

语 — copy, then fade

script and writing topic; Chapter 16, p. 125

语 — speech, five, box

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 16, p. 125

语 — wait, then write

script and writing topic; Chapter 16, p. 125

请 — a half that tells you the sound

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 11, p. 87

谢 — twelve strokes, and three pieces

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 10, p. 79