

Guide

Introduction

So you want to learn Mandarin.../Absolute Beginner (A1/TOCFL1/HSK1)

So you just started learning chinese. For some reason you find yourself on this document instead of these guides:

- <https://www.reddit.com/r/ChineseLanguage/wiki/start>
- <https://teachyourselfmandarin.wordpress.com/>
- https://www.reddit.com/r/ChineseLanguage/comments/j5te9/i_would_like_to_learn_chinese_i_have_no_clue/
- https://www.reddit.com/r/ChineseLanguage/comments/ljt4u/where_to_start_with_learning_chinese/
- https://www.reddit.com/r/ChineseLanguage/comments/29o6rb/as_a_beginner_what_should_my_daily_routine_be_for/
- <https://www.reddit.com/r/ChineseLanguage/>

Or a class setting.

So where should you start? Some things we advise are:

- Find a textbook and work through the whole thing
- Use an app (HelloChinese, LingoDeer, Duolingo)
- Find video courses or podcasts
- Take a course

From ground in the middle (A2-B1/TOCFL 2-3/HSK 4-5)

Cool! You know stuff and you want to know more TM

From not so in the middle (B2/TOCFL4/HSK6)

Imagine not plateauing here

Mini-FAQ

>So, do I have to learn *all* these characters?

No, many characters are not in current use, much like how other languages have archaic vocabulary but in this case, archaic characters and words. However, you only need to know about three thousand to be almost conversationally fluent! This might seem daunting at first but fret not, for as you learn more of them, it'll gradually become as easy or even easier than absorbing vocabulary in any other language.

>How do I pronounce these weird sounds? (x, q, j, etc.)

I (Jade) don't know who wrote this initially, but all I can say is listen and repeat natives. Learning any language requires repeated listening and repeated speaking, and Mandarin is no different.

You can find many pronunciation tutorials on Youtube for the individual sound you have trouble pronouncing. If you have trouble differentiating them in spoken Chinese, this will become easier over time. Until you can, context will help a lot. It also helps to pay attention to what vowel sound typically follows each letter. X, Q, and J are always followed by either an i (ia, iu, etc.) or u (ue, uan, etc.) However, there are some overlaps with their counterparts, SH, CH, and ZH (eg. shi and xi) so you will eventually have to learn to differentiate them. Take note, however, that due to the fact that pinyin maps some sounds to the same romanisation, there exists plenty of false cognates. (e.g. duan and quan, lü and ju, mo and luo, e.t.c.)

>Tones...what are tones?

Tones aren't like the tones in singing. They're essentially various intonations of the same sound that indicate different words. Mandarin Chinese has four tones, with the inclusion of certain "toneless" words:

	Example	Description	Chinese name
1st tone	媽/妈 <i>mā</i> ㄇㄚ	Say the word with completely flat intonation.	Dì yī shēng 第一声
2nd tone	麻 <i>má</i> ㄇㄚˊ	Rising, Like asking "What?" in English	Dì èr shēng 第二声
3rd tone	馬/马	A sort of bouncing tone that goes	Dì sān shēng

	<i>mǎ</i> ㄇㄚˇ	downwards and then upwards.	第三声
4th tone	罵/骂 <i>mà</i> ㄇㄚˋ	Falling, As in "Ready, set, go!"	Dì sì shēng 第四声
Toneless words ("5th tone")	嗎/吗 <i>ma</i> ㄇㄚ˙	A short, unexpressive sound. (Subject to tone sandhi)	Qīngshēng 轻声

Here is a [video](#) where you can hear tones pronounced.

Here is a [wiki](#) that goes more in depth on pronunciation, tones, and pinyin.

>Should I learn traditional or simplified?

Traditional:

- Used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Singapore and most overseas communities
- Greater number of strokes to write a character on average
- Has greater phonetic and semantic consistency

Simplified:

- Used in China, Singapore, Malaysia, and some overseas communities
- Number of strokes to write a character are usually reduced
- Some characters were merged into a usually homophonic character (e.g 發 and 髮 into 发)
- Contains greater phonetic and semantic inconsistency.

Other points to consider:

- When you learn one type, picking up the other is not difficult, transitioning from Traditional to Simplified is usually easier than vice versa
- Aesthetic considerations (what looks more visually appealing)
- Type used in your learning material and material you want to consume (books, comics, etc.)
- Learning one type could mean learning the dialect of Mandarin most associated with it, i.e Taiwanese Mandarin vs Mainland Mandarin, which both have differences in grammar, vocabulary and phonology.
- Simplified and traditional scripts also can have different input methods (Sougou and Wubi does not support traditional, most zhuyin inputs do not support simplified)
- The vast majority of traditional Chinese users can understand the simplified script and vice versa although not as well the other way round.
- For more information, the [Wikipedia article](#) may be helpful.

(Credits: Loger)

>Should I go for HSK or TOCFL?

It depends on what you are aiming for. If you want to study/work/live in Taiwan then go for TOCFL, if it's Mainland China then go for HSK. Keep in mind that HSK is only available in Hong Kong and Mainland China, while TOCFL is only available in Taiwan. Do also note that while you can take TOCFL in either Traditional or Simplified Chinese, HSK only allows Simplified. Here is a comparison chart between HSK and TOCFL.

CEFR	華語文能力測驗 TOCFL		新漢語水平考試 HSK	
	通過等級	詞彙量	通過等級	詞彙量
under A1	-	-	一級	150
			二級	300
A1	Level 1 入門級	500	三級	600
A2	Level 2 基礎級	1000	四級	1200
B1	Level 3 進階級	2500	五級	2500
B2	Level 4 高階級	5000	六級	5000及以上
C1	Level 5 流利級	8000	-	-
C2	Level 6 精通級	8000以上	-	-

Resources

Holistic:

Textbooks:

Available in Simplified and Traditional Chinese:

(A1-B2) [Integrated Chinese](#)

(Credits: 穀灃, Kev)

- You can buy the books here

(A1-A2) [Integrated Chinese Volume 1](#) (Free)

(Credits: Kev)

- Free PDF of the book

(B?) [Integrated Chinese TWO electric boogaloo](#)

- Also a pdf. Click for the adventures of Zhangtian Ming

(A1-C1) New Practical Chinese Reader

(A1-B2) Contemporary Chinese

HSK Textbook (Simplified Chinese):

(A1-C2/HSK1-6) HSK Standard Course

Simplified Chinese:

(Heritage) [Mei Zhou Hua Yu \(MZHY\)](#)

(Credits: Jade)

- Textbook available in both traditional and simplified Chinese
- Written entirely in Chinese (some translations available for texts)
- Some worksheets and flashcards available (depending on grade)
- Includes some audio for texts

Textbooks used in Taiwan (Traditional Chinese):

[A Course in Contemporary Chinese](#)

[TOCFL](#)

Textbooks used in China (Simplified Chinese):

Developing Chinese (发展汉语)

Road to Success (成功之路)

Boya Chinese (博雅汉语)

Online Courses:

[Coursera](#) has several free courses of varying. You can also check with your college to see if they offer any classes online.

Apps:

Note: We prefer using LingoDeer and HelloChinese

For learning:

(A1-B2) [LingoDeer](#) (Paid)

(Credits: 骰子)

(A1-A2/HSK1-4) [HelloChinese](#) (Decent)

(Credits: 骰子)

(A1/HSK1-2) [Duolingo](#) (Bad, don't use alone)

(Credits: 骰子)

Immersion/ messaging:

[HelloTalk](#)

(Credits: 骰子)

- Messaging app that works similar to social media

[Tandem](#)

(Credits: 骰子)

Phonetic Guides:

There are several phonetic guides used in Greater China throughout the course of history and there are two major ones; Zhuyin and Hanyu Pinyin. Zhuyin is currently taught and used in Taiwan, various Southeast Asian nations and in other overseas Chinese communities. It is based on Chinese characters and therefore would be more intuitive for heritage/native speakers or those who already have a fundamental grasp of mandarin. Hanyu Pinyin, which is used in Mainland China and in other overseas Chinese communities are based on the Latin alphabet and would therefore be more intuitive for native speakers of languages of that alphabet.

Zhuyin 注音符號

[Guide to Zhuyin](#)

(Credits: Jade)

- Everything about zhuyin and how to use it answered here

[Origins of Zhuyin](#)

(Credits: 骰子)

[Wikipedia article on Zhuyin](#)

Zhuyin Resources ([Bopomofo](#)) 注音符號資料 (Credits:

Koen)

1. 新編華語注音符號 **Zhuyin Programme for Kindergarten (Audio & Game)**
[Requires Java](#)
2. 新編華語注音符號課本 **Zhuyin Textbook (requires basic chinese skills)**| [eBook](#) | [PDF](#)
3. 新編華語注音符號習作簿 **Zhuyin Workbook (stroke order & practices)**| [eBook](#) | [PDF](#)
4. 新編華語注音符號教學指引 **Zhuyin Teaching Guide (RTL)** | [eBook](#) | [PDF](#)
5. 學華語開步走課本(注音符號) **Zhuyin Textbook** | [eBook](#) | [PDF](#)
6. 學華語開步走習作(注音符號) **Zhuyin Workbook** | [eBook](#) | [PDF](#)
7. 學華語開步走教師手冊(注音符號) **Zhuyin Textbook Teacher's Edition** | [eBook](#) | [PDF](#)

Pinyin:

[Chinese pronunciation guide](#)

(Credits: Kev)

- Explains everything about the tones. Read this, all your questions will be answered

[PinYin Chart](#)

(Credits: Kev)

Grammar:

(A1-B2/HSK1-HSK3) [Allset Learning - Grammar](#)

(Credits: Haruka, Kev, 穀禮)

- Very example-led, concise, expansive

(A1-C2/HSK1-HSK6) [Chinese Boost](#)

(Credits: Haruka, Kev, 穀禮)

- Features: Walks you through concepts slowly or offers a short guide, gives examples of common mistakes
 - No search function
-

Dictionaries:

[懂中文 Dong Chinese](#)

(Credits: Haruka)

- Stroke order, HSK level, frequency statistics (how often a character occurs in HSK),
- Much more helpful with individual characters than with actual vocab; includes images and breaks down the radicals

[Yellow Bridge](#) (Trad and Simp)

(Credits: Haruka)

- Stroke order, examples, thesaurus, zhuyin, traditional
- has paid features bc their site also includes other functions (like radical dissection but who needs that)

[Moedict \(Trad\)](#)

(Credits: Haruka, 穀襪, Kev)

- Includes translations from Chinese to various languages
- Chinese-Chinese dictionary
- In depth explanations and covers a wider range of words than most dictionaries.
- Provides high level examples from a wide range of Chinese literature.
- Provides greater scope of definition than most dictionaries.
- Traditional Chinese only

[Iciba](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

- Slow
- Includes example sentences but few English translations. And it
- includes popup definitions for words in example sentences

[查查在线翻译 \(English-Chinese dictionary\)](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

- Really good for making example sentences
- Chinese only
- More of an English → Chinese dictionary

[在线新华字典 \(Online Chinese dictionary\)](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

- Chinese dictionary with few English translations

[Popup Dictionary](#)

(Credits: TipToe, Kev)

- A browser extension

[Pleco \(Mobile only\) \(Really really good\)](#)

(Credits: Kev)

- Mobile only
- Includes handwriting, Cantonese (Jyutping), voice samples
- Paid version includes OCR (free OCR works for just identifying characters, not defining)
- Just download it, seriously.

[Archinese](#)

(Credits: temsik)

- has the stroke order, synonyms
- lacking more example sentences

Vocabulary Lists:

[HSK Academy \(Trad and Simp\)](#)

(Credits: Haruka)

[Chinese Class 101 - Word Lists \(Trad and Simp\)](#)

(Credits: Haruka)

[Wiktionary - Mandarin Frequency Lists \(Trad and Simp\)](#)

(Credits: Haruka)

[iKnow Courses \(Scroll Down\) \(Trad and Simp\)](#)

(Credits: Haruka)

[Skritter - For Learning Characters \(Paid\)](#)

(Credits: Jacob)

[Estimate how many characters you know \(Simp\)](#)

General Resources:

Wikipedia Page for Mandarin	(Credits: 骰子)
Omniglot - Introduction	(Credits: 骰子)
Omniglot - Basic Phrases	(Credits: 骰子)
Forvo - Audio	(Credits: 骰子)
Tatoeba - Example Sentences	(Credits: 骰子)
Yoyo Chinese	(Credits: Haruka)
DigMandarin	(Credits: Haruka)
Clozemaster blog: Best resources for learning chinese	(Credits: Haruka)
Useful Expressions for Smooth Speaking	(Credits: Jade)
Mandarin in IPA	(Credits: temsik)
Cheng Yu	
Radical List	
Chineasy - The New Way to Read Chinese	(Credits: Perfume)

Reading/Watching/Listening Material:

You Yao Qi - Manhwa	(Credits: 骰子)
Tencent Manhwa	(Credits: 骰子)
Manhuagui - Manhwa (Traditional)	(Credits: 骰子)
Kuaikan Manhwa	(Credits: Jade)
Grimm Fairy Tales	(Credits: 骰子)
Youku	(Credits: 骰子)
Bilibili	(Credits: 骰子)
Radio garden	(Credits: 骰子)
Sound of Mandarin (Youtube)	(Credits: 骰子)
MandarinHQ - Listening	(Credits: Haruka)
Talk Chinese - Podcasts	(Credits: Haruka)
ChinesePod	(Credits: temsik)
Happy Chinese	

Games:

[Detention返校](#)

- Detention is a survival horror adventure video game created and developed by Taiwanese game developer Red Candle Games for Steam. It is a 2D atmospheric horror side-scroller set in 1960s Taiwan under martial law. The game also incorporates religious elements based on Taiwanese culture and mythology.

[Wasabi遊戲](#)

- Wasabi Game is a classic mobile escape game where 12 people are trapped in a mysterious building, forced to play werewolf. The one who is a 'wolf' will have to kill one of the 'sheep' so as to survive. Investigate the building, collect evidence and escape this living hell with your wisdom!
- Comes with easy to follow dialogue that will help to boost your vocabulary while playing significantly.

[OPUS: Rocket of Whispers](#)

- OPUS: Rocket of Whispers is a 2D adventure game developed by Taiwanese independent studio SIGONO. It is the second installment of the OPUS series that began with OPUS: The Day We Found Earth, and focuses on story and exploration, much like its predecessor.
- Be sure to check out the rest of the series as well!

Miscellaneous:

Slang and Gaming Terms:

[echineselearning - Chinese internet slang](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Chinese Internet Slang - Wikipedia](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[re-library - Glossary of common chinese slang/gaming terms](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[電子遊戲術語列表 \(Gaming Slang\)](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[中国大陆网络用语列表 \(Mainlan China Online Internet Slang\)](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Memes](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Chinese Slang Words](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Chinese Internet Slang - chinaSmack](#)

Titles and Ranks:

[RoseFantasy - Ranks](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Nine Rank System](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Albany - Government Offices and Ranks](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Qing Dynasty ranks](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[UOregon - Han Dynasty titles](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Han Dynasty titles](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Dictionary of Official Titles](#) & [Dictionary of Official Titles Honorifics](#)

(Credits: TipToe)

[Dreams of Jianghu](#) (List of titles)

(Credits: TipToe)