

Pinyin (Pronunciation)

Pinyin is a Chinese word that means using the English alphabet to spell the sounds of Chinese characters. **Character**, the basic unit of Chinese written language, is mostly single syllable. Many of characters share the same pinyin but have different tones. In order to differentiate meanings, Chinese relies on tones. For example, 買 **mai** means to buy, 賣 **mai** means to sell, and 花 **hua** means flower, 畫 **hua** means painting. Let's use these four characters to make up some phrases:

Mai hua mai hua mai hua mai hua
(buy flowers) (sell flowers) (buy paintings) (sell paintings)

Different tones completely changed the meaning of the whole word. Therefore, the accuracy of the tone is extremely important.

Most pinyin syllables consist of three parts: an initial (beginning sound) and a final (ending sound) and a tone. (In English, there are over 8,000 syllables, while in Chinese, there are only about 400 basic syllables.)

Initials: There are 21 initials—

b, p, m, f, d, t, n, l, g, k, h, j, q, x, z, c, s, r, zh, ch, sh

Finals: There are 35 finals—

i, u, ü, a, o, e, ie, ai, ei, ao, ou, an, en, ang, eng, ong, ia, iao, iou, ian, in, iang, ing, iong, ua, uo, uai, uei, uan, uen, uang, ueng, ue, uan, un

Tones: There are 5 tones—

	Tone marks	For example
1 st tone	→	ma
2 nd tone	↗	ma
3 rd tone	↘	ma
4 th tone	↘	ma
short sound (no tone marks)		ma