

## Tips on Chinese (Pinyin) Pronunciation

Because pinyin is only an approximation of Chinese sounds, reading pinyin as though it were English will lead to some major mispronunciations. In English, we sound out words by reading each letter. In Chinese, words are built from a limited number of syllables. These syllables are comprised of two parts: the initial (a consonant), and the final (a vowel, combination of vowels, or vowel/consonant combination). Each syllable is a single sound. Thus, *shuai* sounds like shwhy, not shoe-eye (bonus: *shuai ge* means handsome guy).

Most of the initials are pronounced exactly or almost like “hard” English letters. The exceptions are:

Initial	Sound	As in (English)	As in (Chinese)
q	ch	<u>ch</u> ea <u>p</u>	qǐng (please)
x	sh	<u>sh</u> oo <u>t</u>	xièxie (thank you)
z	ds	s <u>u</u> d <u>s</u>	zǎo (morning)
c	ts	ca <u>t</u> s	cuò (wrong)
zh	j	g <u>e</u> m	zhēn (real)

The finals are a little more complicated. Many are reasonably guessable for English speakers, but some are definitely not. Here are the basics and some you might get wrong:

Final	Sound	As in (English)	As in (Chinese)	Notes
a	ah	<u>l</u> aw	mā (mom)	
e	uh	<u>b</u> us	hé (to drink)	
er	ar	<u>b</u> ar	èr (two)	
i	ee	<u>bee</u>	bǐ (pen), pīnyīn	except for zi, ci, si, zhi, chi, shi, ri
	zzz	<u>buzz</u>	sì (four)	zi, ci, si only
	rr	<u>grrr</u>	chī (eat)	zhi, chi, shi, ri only
ian	yen	<u>yen</u>	tiān (sky)	more of an ien sound
ie	yieh	<u>yet</u>	xièxie (thank you)	
iu	eo	<u>leo</u>	liù (eight)	
o	uo	<u>wok</u>	wǒ (I)	same as uo
ou	oh	<u>yoyo</u>	yǒu (have)	
u	oo	<u>fool</u>	zhūròu (pork)	
ui	way	<u>way</u>	duì (right, correct)	
ue	uweh	<u>you wet</u>	yuè (month)	
uo	uo	<u>wok</u>	hěnduō (a lot)	same as o

\*Tip: accent marks denote tone. 1<sup>st</sup> tone: ā; 2<sup>nd</sup> tone: á; 3<sup>rd</sup> tone: ǎ; 4<sup>th</sup> tone: à

To hear all possible Chinese sounds (initials, finals, and combinations) spoken, try this website: <http://www.quickmandarin.com/chinesepinyintable> It also has fun quizzes and games to practice.

**Test!** Try to pronounce these Chinese names. Phonetic “answers” on next page.

Weijuan Wang	Xiaojun Liao	Ziqiao Lin	Peifeng Qui
Pengkun Zhang	Shuqi Shen	Xinyu Huang	Sijia Tao
Yaxuan Liu	Keyi Chuang	Cong Guo	Yuanli Xu

**Remember:** Each syllable is pronounced as a single sound.

**Weijuan Wang**

Way-jwan Wahng

**Xiaojun Liao**

Shiaow-joon Leeaow

**Ziqiao Lin**

Zuh-chyaow Leen

**Peifeng Qi**

Pay-fung Chee

**Pengkun Zhang**

Pung-koon Jahng

**Shuqi Shen**

Shoo-chee Shen

**Xinyu Huang**

Sheen-you Hwahng

**Sijia Tao**

Suh-jyah Tao

**Yaxuan Liu**

Yah-shwan Leo

**Keyi Chuang**

Cuh-yee Chwahng

**Cong Guo**

Tsong Gwoh

**Yuanli Xu**

Ywen-lee Shoo