Workbook

ASSiMiL®

Chinese

False beginners

170 exercises + answer key

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Chinese

False beginners

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Adapted for English speakers
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About this workbook

The 17 lessons in this workbook, which contain some 170 exercises, will allow you to progressively review and practice the fundamentals of Mandarin Chinese. You can choose the pace that suits you. The workbook begins with very simple exercises that contain just a few words. As you progress, vocabulary lists are included to help you do the exercises without having to use a dictionary. It's up to you if you prefer to write your answers using pinyin transcriptions or Chinese characters.

The lessons are designed to gradually build your skills starting from the basics, guiding you with practical tips on how to master the language: avoiding the pitfalls of pinyin, learning Chinese word order without basing it on English syntax, and picking up grammar and sentence structure through useful everyday phrases. The exercises will also help you learn to recognize frequently used Chinese characters. We hope you will find that this workbook provides a fun and systematic way to consolidate your Chinese skills.

As you work through the exercises, you can self-assess your results, checking your answers against the key in the back of the workbook. If the majority of your answers were correct, select the 🙂. If half of your answers were correct, select the 😐. If less than half were correct, select the 🙁, or else try the exercise again the next day! After a lesson, enter the number of icons of each type you received in the exercises, and then enter these totals into the final score table at the end of the workbook so you can tally your results after completing all the exercises.

Contents

1
It's all Chinese to me!

Conveying meaning

Wang Yiwen: Chinese characters represent a meaning rather than just a sound.

Annie: What do you mean? English words also have a meaning.

Wang: Yes, but an English word is formed by combining individual letters, each with its own sound, to form words. For example: y + o + u = you; m + e = me.

Annie: But in Chinese you also read from left to right, don't you?

Wang: Yes, but the characters are not letters – Chinese doesn't have letters, or an alphabet.

Annie: How do you read it then?

Wang: Each character conveys a meaning. Look at these five characters:

马	力	一	你	我
horse	strength	one	you	I, me

1 Look closely at each character and write its meaning beneath it.

一	力	你	马	我
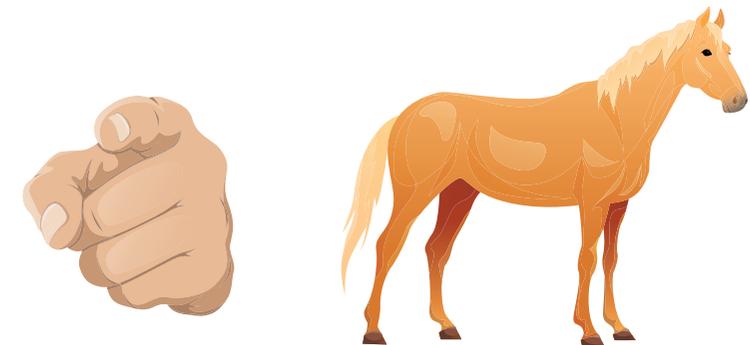
Pronouncing Chinese words

Annie: Ma Li told me that her family name means *horse*.

Wang Yiwen: Yes, her family name is 马 **mǎ** *horse*.

Annie: So how do you know how to pronounce a Chinese word if it doesn't have letters?

Wang: Over time, you learn which sound and which meaning goes with which character.

Annie: That sounds difficult!

Wang: To start with, you can use the pinyin to help you remember a word.

Annie: Pinyin is the Romanization transcription of Chinese characters, is that right?

Wang: Yes, you can use it to type Chinese words into a search engine.

2 **Fill in the table.** ••

Pronunciation	
你	nǐ
力	lì
我	wǒ
马	mǎ
一	yī

Character	Pinyin	Meaning
马	1.	
力	2.	
一	3.	
你	4.	
我	5.	

3 **Look carefully at the characters and then translate the phrases.** ••

我妈	wǒ mā	my ('me') mother	你妈妈	nǐ māma	1.
我爸	wǒ bà	my father	你爸爸	nǐ bàba	2.
第八	dì bā	the eighth	第一	dì yī	3.
秘密	mìmì	secret	我秘密	wǒ mìmì	4.
密码	mìmǎ	password (secret-code)	我密码	wǒ mìmǎ	5.

4 **Now translate these phrases.** ••

巴黎的	Bālí de	from Paris	巴黎	Bālí	1.
爸妈	bàmā	father and mother	我爸妈	wǒ bàmā	2.
弟弟	dìdi	little brother	我弟弟	wǒ dìdi	3.
难	nán	to be difficult	难吗？	Nán ma?	4.
马力	Mǎ Lì	Ma Li (family name + first name)	安妮	Ān Ní	5.

Pronouncing the vowels a, e, i and o

- The **a** in Chinese is pronounced like the *[ah]* in f<u>a</u>ther.
- The **e** has different sounds depending on the preceding consonant, but usually it is pronounced like the *[uh]* in th<u>e</u>.
- The **i** also has different sounds, but usually it is pronounced like the *[ee]* in m<u>e</u>.
- The **o** is a short 'o' like the *[aw]* in <u>o</u>n or s<u>o</u>ng.
- The **a** and **o** can be combined as **ao**, which is similar to the sound *[ow]* as in h<u>ow</u>.

5 **Look carefully at the characters and then complete the pinyin.** ••

Characters	Meaning	Pinyin and [phonetic transcription]
你好。	Hello.	1. .... **hǎo** *[how]*.
马力，你好。	Hello, Ma Li.	2. **Mǎ Lì** *[mah lee]*, ...
你好吗？	How are you?	3. .... **ma?**
很好！	Very well!	4. **Hěn** *[huhn]* .... !
你呢？	And you?	5. .... **ne** *[nuh]*?

Soft vowel sounds

Some vowel sounds in Chinese are pronounced softly, without strongly enunciating them. For example, the question words 吗？ **ma?** and 呢 **ne?** almost sound like *[mₐₕ]* and *[nᵤₕ]* as if the lips barely open to make the vowel sound.

6 **Put the words in pinyin in the right order.**

Hello, Wang Yiwen.	**Wáng/nǐ/Yīwén/hǎo**	1. ....
How are you?	**hǎo/nǐ/ma?**	2. ....
How's your little brother?	**hǎo/nǐ/dìdi/ma?**	3. ....
Is it hard?	**ma?/nán**	4. ....
It's very hard!	**hěn/nán!**	5. ....

Asking questions

- The particle 吗？**ma?** at the end of a phrase is used to form a question.
- A question and an answer have exactly the same word order.

7 **Use the answers to find the questions.**

Questions ending in 吗？ **ma?**	**Answers**	
1. .... *Has Ma Li arrived?*	**Tā dào le.** *[tah dao luh]* *He has arrived.*	他到了。
2. .... *Are you well, Ma Li?*	**Wǒ hěn hǎo.** *I am very well.*	我很好。
3. .... *Is French difficult?*	**Fǎwén hěn nán!** *French is very hard!*	法文很难！
4. .... *More difficult than English?*	**Bǐ yīngwén nán.** *Yes, harder than English.*	比英文难。
5. .... *Do you want to learn it?*	**Yào xué.** *[yao shueh]* *Yes, I want to learn it.*	要学。

1 character = 1 meaning = 1 syllable

- Each character has a meaning and corresponds to a phonetic syllable.
- Some characters (for example, the question particle 吗 **ma?**) don't have a meaning on their own, but indicate a grammatical function.
- The space between characters is always consistent. There are no spaces between words in Chinese.

8 **Write the pinyin under the characters. Does the number of syllables match?**

马力，你好。 | *Hello, Ma Li.*

1. ....

王一文，你好吗？ | *Wang Yiwen, how are you?*

2. ....

很好，你呢？ | *Very well, and you?*

3. ....

我到巴黎了！ | *I arrived in Paris!*

4. ....

你要学英文吗？ | *Do you want to learn English?*

5. ....

A tonal language

Annie: Hello? Wang Yiwen? I've almost finished the first lesson.

Wang: Are you finding the pinyin helpful to work out the pronunciation?

Annie: Yes, but I don't understand all the accents over the vowels!

Wang: Those are tone marks. In Chinese, syllables can be spoken in different pitches. In some online dictionaries, you can listen to the words to see how this sounds.

Annie: I'll try it and I'll call you back. 好吗？ **Hǎo ma?** *Okay?*

Wang: 好！ **Hǎo!** *Okay!*

9 Practice the 1st tone by reading these phrases aloud.

The **1st tone** is high and level, a bit like the continuous sound of a tuning fork. It is marked with a horizontal line over the vowel, e.g. **ā** or **ī**.

ā and ī in the 1st tone (high and level)			
ā	**1. wǒ mā**	*my mother*	我妈
ān	**2. Ān Ní**	*Annie*	安妮
bā	**3. Bālí**	*Paris*	巴黎
yī	**4. dì yī**	*the first*	第一
tā	**5. tā**	*he, him*	他

10 Practice the 3rd tone by reading these words aloud.

ǒ, ǐ and ǎ in the 3rd tone (low)			
ǒ	**1. wǒ**	*I, me, my*	我
ǐ	**2. nǐ**	*you, your*	你
ǎ	**3. hǎo**	*good, fine*	好
ǎ	**4. mǎ**	*horse*	马
ǎ	**5. fǎwén**	*French*	法文

In contrast, the **3rd tone** starts in a very low pitch, dips slightly and then rises. It is marked with a **v** over a vowel, e.g. **ǒ, ǐ** or **ǎ**.

Well done, you've reached the end of Lesson 1! It's time to count up how many of each type of icon you received. Then record your results in the final self-assessment table on page 128.

2
The verb 'to be'

The two pronunciations of 'i'

- In Lesson 1, we saw that the **i** in Chinese is usually pronounced like the *[ee]* in m*e*. This is the case in 你 **nǐ** *[nee] you* and 弟弟 **dìdi** *[deedee] younger brother*.

- But after certain consonants or consonant pairs, the **i** is a short 'i' that sounds like the *[ih]* in sh*i*p, if you stopped short before pronouncing the final consonant. The lips hardly open to let out the vowel sound.

- This short **i** occurs in the verb 是 **shì** *to be*, which is pronounced *[shih]* … the sound is very similar to *shin*.

1 Number the phrases to put this conversation in the right order.

☐ 他是谁？
Tā shì shéi? *[tah shih shay]* | *Who is he?*

☐ 我是安妮。
Wǒ shì *[waw shih]* **Ān Ní.** | *I'm Annie.*

☐ 你好。你是……？
Nǐ hǎo. Nǐ shì *[shih]* **… ?** | *Hello. You are … ?*

☐ 是我的老师。
Shì wǒ de lǎoshī. *[lao-shih]* | *He's my professor.*

☐ 他姓王。
Tā xìng Wáng. *[tah sheen⁹ wahn⁹]* | *His family name is Wang.*

2 In the exercise above, how is the **i** pronounced in each word?

'i' as in *[ee]* in:	'i' as in *[ih]* in:

A verb that identifies

- The verb 是 **shì** *[shih]* is used strictly to identify something: e.g. *It's this or that. It's me. It's her.* So it is always followed by a noun or a pronoun.
- It is <u>not</u> used to describe the location of something: e.g. *It's here. It's there.*
- It is <u>not</u> used to describe the quality of something: e.g. *It's difficult. It's good.*

3 Put the words in the right order without moving the final question word.

你是谁？
shì/nǐ/shéi? | *Who are you?*

1. ....

你是安妮吗？
Ān Ní/shì/nǐ/ma? | *Are you Annie?*

2. ....

你的老师是谁？
nǐ de/shì/lǎoshī/shéi? | *Who is your professor?*

3. ....

是李老师吗？
Lǐ/shì/lǎoshī/ma? | *Is it Professor Li?*

4. ....

是她吗？
shì/tā/ma? | *Is that her?*

5. ....

4 Write each pair of characters in pinyin, with the tone marks.

你/他　　是/师　　马/吗　　好/老　　他/她

1. ....　**2.** ....　**3.** ....　**4.** ....　**5.** ....

The aspirated consonants pʰ / tʰ / kʰ

In Chinese, certain consonants are aspirated, which means they are pronounced with a forceful exhalation of breath. We hear this in **h**ʰ, for example: **hǎo** *[hao]* good, well. Here are three other consonants that are strongly aspirated:

- **p**: e.g. **pa** *[pah]*. If this is not aspirated, the Chinese will hear **ba**.
- **t**: e.g. **ta** *[tah]*. If this is not aspirated, the Chinese will hear **da**.
- **g**: e.g. **ge** *[guh]*. If this is not aspirated, the Chinese will hear **ke** *[kuh]*.

So remember to really emphasize **p**, **t** and **k** if you want to be understood!

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This workbook is aimed at Chinese false beginners. The 170 stimulating exercises include a wide range of types of activities. Fun and challenging, the exercises progress in difficulty and are designed not only to review your skills, but extend them. The answer key allows you to check how you did in each exercise and assess your level in different areas. Every aspect of the language is covered — the pinyin transcription, pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, etc. — with helpful tips given throughout.

- **More than 170 Chinese exercises**
- **A wide variety of different types of activities**
- **An answer key for self-assessment**

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