

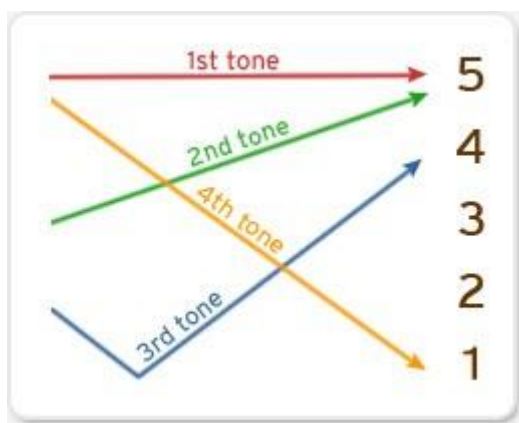
Tones

There are actually four basic tones and a neutral tone in Mandarin Chinese. Tone is a very unique feature of Chinese language, and tones directly affect the meaning of what is said. In Chinese, even with the same initial and final, different tones represent different characters and meanings.

For example,

this syllable “ba”, in the first tone, it’s pronounced as “bā”, which means “eight”;

however, when in the third tone, “bà”, it means “Dad”.



The First tone

The first tone, also known as flat tone. Its tone mark is also flat. It’s high pitched and no change when you pronounce it. When you pronounce the first tone, there is no any up and down in your pitch. If you hear the pitch

variety, like a little dropping or raising, then you are wrong. You should be able to prolong your voice as long as you can.

The Second tone

The second tone is a raising tone. It's from the middle pitch to the high pitch. What does that mean by raising? It sounds like when you say the English word "what?" You should obviously sense the pitch is "raising".

The Third tone

The third tone, falling and raising tone. So the tone mark is written like a "v" in English letter. It feels like when you are riding a roller skate, you go down and then go up. You can hear that there is a little bounce. It sounds like when you say the English letter "well".

The Fourth tone

The fourth tone is a falling tone. It's from the high pitch to the low pitch. So the tone mark is from up to down. Just like you drop your voice and it falls down. It sounds like when you say "no!" or "yes!" in English, it can be short and powerful when you pronounce it.

The Neutral tone

The fifth tone is neutral tone, which is a very light and soft tone, so it's also called light tone. It has no tone mark when you write a pinyin syllable

with neutral tone. Because the length of your sound is very short when you pronounce this neutral tone. There is also no certain pitch, because the neutral tone is pronounced naturally and it follows the intonation of the phrase or sentence which it is located in.

Third tone sandhi

Here comes an important tone rule. It's the Third Tone Sandhi. It's a common phonetic phenomenon in Chinese language. When a third tone followed by another third tone, the first one becomes a second tone naturally when you pronounce it, but the tone mark remains unchanged when you write. Here are some examples:

This word, 你好 (nǐ hǎo) , means "hello". When we pronounce it, the first one "nǐ" becomes the second tone "ní", and this word is pronounced as "ní hǎo".

老虎 (lǎo hǔ) , means "tiger". When we pronounce it, the first one "lǎo" becomes the second tone "láo", and this word is pronounced as "láo hǔ".

我很好 (wǒ hěn hǎo) , mean "I'm fine". When we pronounce it, the first two both become the second tone, so it is pronounced as "wó hén hǎo."

I would like to remind you again that it's only the pronunciation rule, so do not change the tone mark in pinyin when you write it!

3rd Tone Sandhi

V + V
(3rd) (3rd)

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/ + V
(2nd) (3rd)