

QUICK CHINESE LESSONS
BY THAT'S MANDARIN

LESSON 1



1. To Be | 是 (shì)

Our first Quick Chinese Lesson is about one of the most common Chinese words.

It is the verb 是 (shì), which means "to be". It is equivalent to "am, is, are" in the present tense and "was, were" in the past tense. Use 是 (shì) only with nouns.

STRUCTURE

Pronoun / Noun + 是 (shì) + Noun



她是老师。
Tā shì lǎoshī.
She is a teacher.



他是医生。
Tā shì yīshēng.
He is a doctor.

2. Very | 很 (hěnn)

But to say things like “You are tall” or “China is beautiful”, you’ll need an adverb. The most common Chinese adverb is 很 (hěnn), which literally means “**very**”.

STRUCTURE

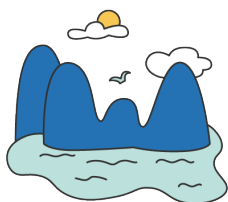
Pronoun / Noun + 很 (hěnn) + Adjective



你**很**高。
Nǐ **hěnn** gāo.
You are tall.



我**很**好。
Wǒ **hěnn** hǎo.
I am good.



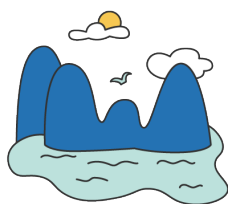
中国**很**漂亮。
Zhōngguó **hěnn** piàoliang.
China is beautiful.

3. Very | 非常 (fēicháng)

What if you want to say “China is very beautiful”? In this case, you can use a “stronger” adverb of degree, such as **非常 (fēicháng)**, which is a stronger way to say “very”.

STRUCTURE

Pronoun / Noun + 非常 (fēicháng) + Adjective



中国**非常**漂亮。

Zhōngguó **fēicháng** piàoliang.

China is very beautiful.

To wrap up, just remember that **是 (shì)** is usually followed by a noun, whereas an adverb like **很 (hěn)** is usually followed by an adjective.

4. Using 的 (de) with Adjectives

In English, it's common to see phrases like “a beautiful park”, “an interesting person”, “a big room”, etc. You don't need to put anything between an adjective and a noun in these cases.

In Chinese, things get a bit more complicated. You will need to add 的 (de) between an adjective and a noun, depending on what adjective it is.

STRUCTURE

Pronoun / Noun + 的 (de) + Noun

Generally speaking, 的 (de) is not needed if the adjective is made of just one character. If an adjective contains two or more syllables, then you'll need 的 (de). Just follow this simple rule and you'll be fine. Let's have a look at some examples:

1. With adjectives made of **more than one character**; use 的 (de):



漂亮的公园

piàoliang de gōngyuán

a beautiful park

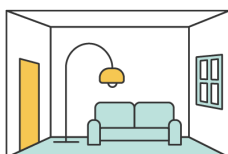


有趣的人

yǒuqù de rén

an interesting person

2. With adjectives made of **only one character**; do not add 的 (de):



大房间

dà fángjiān

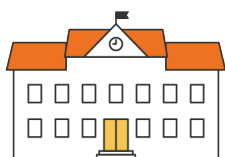
a big room

5. Simple Sentence Structure

If you are a beginner, these four structures will help you avoid making mistakes when you build simple Chinese sentences.

STRUCTURE 1

Subject + Verb + Object



我去学校。

Wǒ qù xuéxiào.

I'm going to school.

Literally: I go to school.

STRUCTURE 2

Subject + Time + Verb + Object



我八点去学校。

Wǒ bā diǎn qù xuéxiào.

I go to school at 8 o'clock.

Literally: I at 8 o'clock go to school.

STRUCTURE 3

Subject + Place + Verb + Object



我在家吃晚饭。

Wǒ zài jiā chī wǎnfàn.

I have dinner at home.

Literally: I at home eat dinner.

STRUCTURE 4

Subject + Time + Place + Verb + Object



我六点半在家吃晚饭。

Wǒ liù diǎn bàn zài jiā chī wǎnfàn.

I have dinner at home at 6:30.

Literally: I at 6.30 at home eat dinner.

6. How to Ask Basic Questions

Many Chinese learners are told that 吗 (ma) is used at the end to form a question. However, this is not always correct even when creating basic questions.

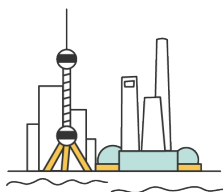
STRUCTURE

Sentence + 吗 (ma) + ?

吗 (ma) needs to be added at the end of a yes-no question only. For questions like “Where are you?”, “What time is it?”, there is no need to add 吗 (ma).

Let's have a look at some examples.

1. For **yes-no** questions; use 吗 (ma):



你喜欢上海吗?
Nǐ xǐhuan Shànghǎi ma?
Do you like Shanghai?



他有中文名字吗?
Tā yǒu Zhōngwén míngzi ma?
Does he have a Chinese name?

2. For **other types** of questions (who? what? why? where?), do not add 吗 (ma):



你在哪里?
Nǐ zài nǎlǐ?
Where are you?

In our future lessons, we will learn more about different types of questions.

7. When to Use 和 (hé)

The Chinese word 和 (hé) is another basic, but important word which is often misused by Chinese learners. Although its equivalent meaning in English is indeed “and”, when it comes to the usage of this word, we need to get rid of our “English way of thinking”.

In English, the word “and” can connect nouns, adjectives, phrases, and sentences.

For example:

“I like apples and bananas” (Noun + and + Noun);

“I am happy and excited” (Adjective + and + Adjective);

“I am interested in reading novels and playing chess” (Phrase + and + Phrase);

“I am Mike and this is my friend Tom” (Sentence + and + Sentence).

1. In Chinese, 和 (hé) can only connect 2 nouns, pronouns or noun phrases.

STRUCTURE

Noun + 和 (hé) + Noun



我喜欢苹果和香蕉。

Wǒ xǐhuan píngguǒ hé xiāngjiāo.

I like apples and bananas.



我对读小说和下棋感兴趣。

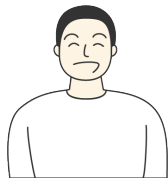
Wǒ duì dú xiǎoshuō hé xiàqí gǎn xìngqù.

I am interested in reading novels and playing chess.

2. To connect 2 **adjectives**, use 又 (yòu).

STRUCTURE

又 (yòu) + Adjective + 又 (yòu) + Adjective



我又高兴又激动。

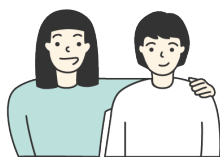
Wǒ yòu gāoxìng yòu jīdòng.

I am happy and excited.

3. And for “Sentence + and + Sentence”, just add a comma in writing, and a pause in speech to separate them:

STRUCTURE

Sentence , Sentence



我是 Emma, 这是我的朋友 Tom。

Wǒ shì Emma, zhè shì wǒ de péngyou Tom.

I am Emma, and this is my friend Tom.

8. 合适 (héshì) vs. 适合 (shìhé)

The words 合适 (héshì) and 适合 (shìhé) sometimes also cause trouble to Chinese learners as both words consist of exactly the same characters, and their meanings are very similar. But they are used differently.

1. 合适 (héshì) is an adjective which means “suitable”.

STRUCTURE

Subject + 很 (hěn) + 合适 (héshì)



这件衬衫很合适。
Zhè jiàn chènshān hěn héshì.
This shirt is the right one.

2. 适合 (shìhé) is a verb which means “to suit”.

STRUCTURE

Subject + 很 (hěn) + 适合 (shìhé) + Person



这件衬衫很适合你。
Zhè jiàn chènshān hěn shìhé nǐ.
This shirt suits you well.

9. To Meet, 见 (jiàn) or 见面 (jiànmiàn)

Both 见 (jiàn) and 见面 (jiànmiàn) mean “to meet”, “to see”. You can use any of these two words in a sentence to express the say “A meets B”.

Let's look at the examples.

1. 见 (jiàn), is a verb to “to see/meet”, and it can be followed by a person.

STRUCTURE

A + 见 (jiàn) + B



我想见你。
Wǒ xiǎng jiàn nǐ.
I want to see you.

2. 见面 (jiànmiàn), to see/meet, and it can not be directly followed by a person. You will need to use the word 和 (hé), “with”.

STRUCTURE:

A + 和 (hé) + B + 见面 (jiànmiàn)



昨天我和他见面了。
Zuótiān wǒ hé tā jiànmiàn le.
I met him yesterday.

10. When to Use 还是 (háishi) and 或者 (huòzhě)

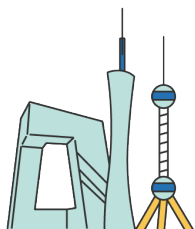
Many Chinese learners get confused with 还是 (háishi) with 或者 (huòzhě) as they both mean “or”. But they’re used differently too.

1. 还是 (háishi)

还是 (háishi) is usually used in **questions**, such as “Do you want to drink tea or coffee?”; “Do you like Shanghai or Beijing?” Use it to ask someone to choose between 2 options.

STRUCTURE:

A + 还是 (háishi) + B?



你喜欢上海**还是**北京?

Nǐ xǐhuan Shànghǎi **háishi** Běijīng?

Do you like Shanghai or Beijing?

2. 或者 (huòzhě)

或者 (huòzhě) is used in **positive or negative statements**, such as “Either tea or coffee is fine.”

STRUCTURE:

A + 或者 (huòzhě) + B

Take a look at the following dialogue in which both words can be used:



A: 你要茶**还是**咖啡?

Nǐ yào chá **háishi** kāfēi?

Do you want to drink tea or coffee?



B: 茶**或者**咖啡。

Chá **huòzhě** kāfēi.

Either tea or coffee is fine.

11. How to Use Negatives 不 (Bù) and 没 (Méi)

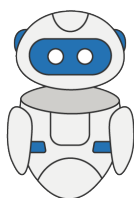
With the verb “to have”

In Chinese, both 不 (bù) and 没 (méi) can be used to negate a verb.

But when it comes to the verb 有 (yǒu), “to have”, you can only use 没 (méi) to say “not to have”.

STRUCTURE:

Subject + 没有 (méi yǒu) + Noun



我没有女朋友。
Wǒ méi yǒu nǚpéngyou.
I don't have a girlfriend.



我没有钱。
Wǒ méi yǒu qián.
I don't have any money.

NEVER EVER say 不有 (bù yǒu)! There is NO such word.

With other verbs

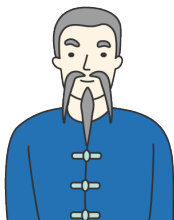
It's also important to understand how to use 不 (bù) and 没 (méi) with other verbs.

1. 不 (bù)

不 (bù) + verb is used for negation of present and future actions.

STRUCTURE:

Subject + 不 (bù) + Verb



我不去学校。

Wǒ bù qù xuéxiào.

I don't go to school. /

I am not going to school.



我不吃早饭。

Wǒ bù chī zǎofàn.

I don't eat breakfast. /

I am not going to eat breakfast.

2. 没有 (méi yǒu)

没有 (méi yǒu) + verb is used for negation of **past actions**.

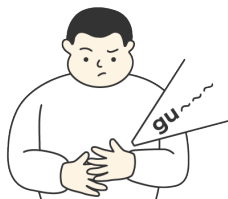
Using 有 (yǒu) in this case is optional.

STRUCTURE:

Subject + 没 (méi) + 有 (yǒu) + Verb




昨天我**没(有)**去学校。
Zuótiān wǒ **méi(yǒu)** qù xuéxiào.
Yesterday I didn't go to school.



今天我**没(有)**吃早饭。
Jīntiān wǒ **méi(yǒu)** chī zǎofàn.
I didn't have breakfast today.

We hope you've enjoyed our first lesson!

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