



## **A Beginner's Guide to Learning Chinese**

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# Introduction

For many years now, the world has been insisting that everyone should speak English. But across the world, countries have provided their young with initiatives to learn other languages also. Yet in recent months, Americans have now come to realize that there is now a need for people to be able to speak languages that are more specialized. Certainly the fact is that one language which many schools are now considering including within their curriculum's, not just in the USA, but around the world is Chinese.

Presently, 1.3 billion people speak Chinese around the world, and of this, 885 million speak Mandarin (the official language of China), which also happens to be the most dominant dialect. Currently in the USA, only 24,000 students (Grades 7 through to 12) are actually studying this language, but their numbers are steadily growing.

However, the biggest problem that many educators in the US are facing when it comes to expanding their Chinese programs, is finding people who are actually qualified to teach it. There are only a few Universities in the USA which offer programs to allow people to train and gain their teacher's certification in teaching the Chinese language. One University (George Mason) included a program which would allow people to gain their teacher's certificate for teaching Mandarin, and a total of 2 people enrolled on the course. This is where exchange courses come in useful, and are very critical to helping ensure that this language, along with Arabic, can be taught in US schools.

However for those that are interested in learning the Chinese language, you will find it can be very difficult. So you need to be prepared to spend a good deal of your spare time, as you will find it will take some time to learn. However, through this book, we hope to provide you with some useful information that will help you to learn Chinese.

# Chapter 1 –

## **Some Simple Facts Regarding the Chinese Language**

Today, the most standard form of Chinese that is spoken is known as Standard Mandarin, which is based on a dialect spoken in Beijing. It is also the official language now used by the people of China, as well as those in Taiwan, and one of 4 official languages spoken by those people from Singapore.

Also, you will find that this language has now become one of the six official languages used by the United Nations.

Another standard language that is spoken by Hong Kong and Macau, which are also part of China, is Standard Cantonese.

But in this book, we will be looking closely at how to learn Standard Mandarin.

Most of the dialects now spoken by the Chinese people will often consist of words spoken by their ancestors, back when China was made up of various different ethnic groups.

It was only after these groups had come together under the Chinese empire, did they start to unite the languages that they spoke.

However, as the Chinese use a standard formal written language, no matter what dialect they speak, often people will regard these dialects as being equal. But in fact, they are like any other country, their own individuals; they just use a standardized form of writing.

It was during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that Beijing Mandarin became the more standard form of Chinese language to be use. But it was at this time many Chinese did speak variations of Mandarin, though they were very limited.

However, things changed when the education system in China was based on Standard Mandarin, and was to be used as the language for carrying out instructions. Today, nearly every person in mainland China speaks Mandarin.

It is important to note that the various different dialects of spoken Chinese use tones. Some areas of China (in the North) will only use as many as 3 tones, while in Southern China, they can use between 6 or 10 tones as they speak.

Today, more and more people are looking to learn Mandarin in the Western hemisphere of the world. Up until about 10 years ago, it was proving to be extremely difficult to find someone who could teach others this language.

Today, there are quite a number of schools across the US, and across the rest of the world, where this language is now being taught.

Back in 1991 there were only 2,000 people taking China's official Chinese language proficiency test, and this figure had risen to 117,660 by 2005. In fact, the Ministry of Education in China believe

that there are over 30 million people around the world who are learning Mandarin.

## Chapter 2 –

# Ways to Learn the Chinese Language

If, like many others, you have wanted to learn a language which is both unique, and not many people are familiar with, then why not consider learning Chinese? Below we provide you with some easy tips which can help you to learn a language, which is becoming increasingly essential in modern life.

First, you need to look at the best way you learn any subject. Are you someone who learns a language best when they rewrite phrases that they have heard? Or are you someone who finds it much easier to learn a language by rereading things over and over again?

You may find it much easier to learn the language if you either say them out loud yourself, or hear someone else saying them out loud for you. But if you are unsure, then try practicing each technique that has been mentioned above, and you will soon see which of them will help you to remember what you are learning more effectively.

By rewriting each phrase or word on to a page of a book will definitely help, as this means that you have something that you can refer back to if you are having problems.

It is also essential that you learn the 4 different tones that the Chinese people use when they speak.

Each tone will be drawn over the word that is spoken in order to give it a different form of pronunciation.

The first tone that the Chinese people use is high but flat. This means that the voice stays flat and should not either rise or dip in any way.

The second tone that the Chinese use is a rising tone, and the person's voice should raise as they speak.

The third tone is known as the dipping tone, and when a word is spoken it will go up and then rise.

While the fourth tone used when speaking Chinese is the lowering tone. When used, this makes the word being spoken sound manlier.

The best way of learning how the tones sound is through listening to a native speaker, as for many, actually getting an idea of what they should sound like simply by reading text is extremely difficult.

There are various ways that you can learn to speak Chinese, and below are some ways that you may want to try.

1. In order to learn more phrases, you should try and get hold of a copy of "How to Learn Mandarin". This you can easily do either through your local bookstore, or online through such sites as Amazon.
2. Get hold of some CD's which you can then play while driving your car, or while relaxing at home.

3. If you are able to, and your local School or College are offering them, then take part in an introductory course to learning Chinese. This is probably one of the best ways to not only gain confidence in speaking the language, but also helps to ensure that you pronounce the words and tones correctly. By doing this course, a person will be able to have a solid foundation for then learning the language on their own.
  
4. Another way of helping yourself to learn the language more effectively is by using flashcards, which can be extremely helpful. However, when using this system, it is also important that you practice using each word that you learn in sentences.

When it actually comes to learning any language, and not just Chinese, persistence is the key. Say you have learned something, then you should not stop studying it or repeating what you have learned, otherwise you will find that you will forget it.

Certainly practice is essential when it comes to learning any language, but you should not practice too much, or else you will find that you begin to forget what you have already learned. Overdoing the studying will simply add too much information to the brain, causing some of what was learned to be dumped to make space for the new information (this relates to short term and long term memory).

## **Chapter 3 –**

# **How to Learn Chinese**

Today, Chinese is now becoming one of the most popular languages that people are studying and learning. The reason for this is that China is becoming extremely influential in the world's business markets.

However, if you are considering learning this language, it is important to note that it can be very difficult.

Again, it is important to remember that this language is tonal, and each word, when pronounced using the 4 different tones, will have a different meaning.

Also, you not only need to learn about the tones, you also have to learn about the Chinese characters, and these, then, need to be memorized.

Certainly the best way to learn and study the language is by going to China. Immersing yourself in the language and culture will probably provide a person with a better rounded way of learning the language.

If you can, find somewhere that does exchange programs, or find a private school in one of the many beautiful cities in China that you could attend.

However, going to China, for some people, is a problem because of the cost implications. Luckily, this is where the internet comes in.

The internet has now made it extremely easy and possible for anyone who wants to learn Chinese, without actually having to go to China to carry out their studies. There are several different sites on the web which can offer you free lessons to learn Chinese. One such example is <http://www.chinese-tools.com/learn/chinese>

Another great way for learning the language, if you are unable to spend time in the country itself, is through finding an exchange partner.

The best way of finding an exchange partner is through your local College or School or ESL Department. They will be able to find you a student whose native language is Chinese, and is willing to spend time with you teaching you their language.

However, you will need to reciprocate and be prepared to spend time with them teaching them how to speak your language. It is recommended to have basic familiarity with the language before looking into this, as communication in the early going can be rather difficult!

There are also a number of groups that have been organized by such sites as Yahoo, where you can join and start to learn Chinese. One example is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/alearningchineseonlineclub/>

It is through these groups and forums that you will be able to post any questions you may have regarding the language, and be provided with

feedback from those that either speak Chinese or those that are also learning it themselves.

The final way you may want to consider for learning to speak Chinese is through making new friends whose native tongue is this language.

Soon, you will discover just how much easier it is to learn this language when you spend time with those people whose speak this language first and foremost.

# Chapter 4 –

## Easy Ways to Learn Chinese

No matter which language it is you have decided to learn, you will need to be committed to putting a lot of time and effort into your studies. This is even truer of Chinese as there are a lot of differences between the native language, and what is considered to be the official language of the country. Below we provide some suggestions on how to maximize the time you spend learning Chinese, making it as easy as possible for you.

1. By integrating new items with material that is more familiar to you, it will make the foundation of your learning much stronger.
2. A good idea is to create a concept map, which will then help you to analyze characters or those groups of characters which are similar. However, it is important that the groups of characters should have the same sort of meaning, and should be created in the following types of clusters.
  - a. Words which fit into the same sort of pattern.
  - b. Those characters which share the same sort of radical or same sort of phonetic (similar pronunciation) components.
  - c. Those characters which share any other type of component that is similar.

- d. Look at placing those characters together which have a shared idea, such as colors, activities or places.
3. Create yourself a hierarchical chart that is able to break down single characters into much smaller and also more meaningful components.
4. Create yourself a mnemonic device which will then help you to remember particular parts of your character. One way of remembering it is through using a picture, which will suggest the characters particular strokes.
5. After each lesson, it is best if you review what you have been taught 15 minutes afterwards. In studies carried out, it has been shown that those students who carry out a review of what they have been taught shortly afterwards are able to retain the information much better.
6. Read out loud. Reading out loud is not only a great way for you to practice what you are learning, but will help you to discover particular words and phrases which you may have not mastered as yet. Also, when it comes time to read out loud what you have been learning in classroom environment, you will find it much easier to do.
7. Rather than studying for long periods of time, just study a little each day, especially before you are due to take a

test. By doing this, you will find that it makes it much easier for you to learn the language, rather than having to spend time cramming at the end just before you are about to take the test. Certainly you are more likely to retain information better using this method.

8. Rather than carrying out the learning of any new vocabulary in one long session, you should instead break it up into several small sessions. You can do this while travelling to school or work, or even when you are waiting in line to pay for your groceries.
9. The most effective way for anyone to learn Chinese characters is through memorizing them. A great way of doing this is through writing them down. However, instead of writing the same word down over and over again, you should write each word down once or twice before you move on to the next one. Then you need to go through the list again until you have carried out the number of repetitions as required by your instructor. Doing this actually helps to put the words more firmly in to your mind and memory.
10. If you can, practice things with a study partner. You can do this by getting each of you to read a line, and then get the other person to respond (but you must not use your books or study notes). Then, in order for you to understand what has been said, you should each then provide them with a response in English.

11. Also, when you are reading Chinese, and in order to understand the characters better, a person should cover up the pinyin while they are reading the text. If you are unsure of what a character is, then write down some notes on a separate piece of paper which you can then refer back to later.

By developing some of the habits that we have suggested above, a person will soon find learning the Chinese much easier.

## Chapter 5 –

# Some Basic Language Skills Required for Learning Chinese

When it comes to learning the basics of the Chinese language, the biggest obstacles that people will face are as follows:-

1. How to write, as well as recognize the characters which make up the Chinese language.
2. How to pronounce the characters correctly.
3. What each character means.
4. How to find each character.

However, because there have been advancements in relation to the technology used for producing Chinese software, this now makes it not only easy for a person to learn the language, but also makes it a lot of fun as well.

In this article, we will be taking a closer look at the Chinese characters.

There are well over 80,000 Chinese characters to be found in the Chinese language, but a lot of these are very rarely used today. In fact, in order to

have the basic foundations for being able to read and write in Chinese, a person will only need a few thousand of these characters.

However, what you will soon discover is that, for every English word in order for it to be translated into Chinese, they will use two or more characters. Each character should be used together, and then read from left to right.

So in order for you to master this language, you really need to learn everything with regard to the Chinese characters.

There are a number of different styles of Chinese writing, and some styles are, in fact, more ancient than others. What also should be noted is that, as well as different styles, there are differences in the way in which these styles are written.

So each Chinese character, no matter what style of writing is being used, will be used according to its purpose within the written text.

As well as the different styles, there are 2 forms of Chinese characters which are being used. These are simplified and traditional.

Simplified is the form of writing which is now used in mainland China, while the more traditional form of writing can be found being used in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Within the simplified writing there are a total of 2,235 characters, and this results in the Chinese characters being the same but just in 2 different forms.

However, the actual number of commonly used Chinese characters being used today is around 3,500. Most

of the Chinese characters you will see on many sites today will use the simplified form.

## **Chapter 6 –**

# **How to Go About Learning Chinese Online**

When it comes to learning the Chinese language, one of the most interesting ways is by finding course online. More and more people are becoming interested in learning this language because of the growth in China within the economic markets. Currently, over 1.2 billion (1 in 5) people speak this language. In fact, it is the most commonly spoken language throughout the world today.

When it comes to learning Chinese online, it does not matter whether you are a complete novice, or someone who has a little experience, there are courses available to suit all standards.

These courses will help you to learn how to write the characters, understand the grammar as well as using the right tones and ways to pronounce the words.

So if you are really interested in learning Chinese, but you just do not have the time or money to either go to China or attend a local school or college, there is a great new way of learning this language. There are some teachers who provide lessons relating to the Chinese language using Skype (which is a widely used and free form of Voice over Internet Protocol).

Because of the growth in internet connections, as well as the advancements in voice over internet protocol (VOIP) software, it has made it extremely easy for people to find a tutor who can teach them the basics of the language. You can also use this method if you want to polish up on what you have already learned.

If you are really interested in being able to carry out conversational Chinese on a regular basis, then Skype may be the way to go.

You will find that, not only can you get hold of freelance tutors providing Chinese lessons on Skype, but there are also language schools which have now decided to use this form of technology to help their students with their lessons. The great thing is that most of these schools and tutors are actually located in China. But because of the time difference, learning Chinese this way is beneficial for many students in the US, as they can actually carry out their lessons from the comfort of their own home and it will not actually interfere with their normal daily routines.

Using Skype is certainly beneficial to those people who want to enjoy speaking conversational Chinese with those people for whom this is their first language.

## **Chapter 7 –**

# **Some Techniques Which May Assist You When Learning to Speak Chinese**

When it comes to learning Chinese, the best thing a person can do is learn various techniques, which will make all the difference at just how successful and effective your training is.

Below, we provide some tips, as well as techniques, which can help you to master the Chinese language. Certainly by using either one or various combinations of the techniques and tips provided below, a person will not only maximize their time, but also how effectively they learn the language. Remember, when it comes to learning a language, you should make it as much fun and enjoyable as possible.

### **Step 1**

When it comes to learning Chinese, the first thing anyone should do is learn Chinese Pinyin. It is this which contains the Chinese phonetic alphabets that are used to pronounce the Chinese characters. Also, learning Pinyin will help you to distinguish the 4 different tones that are used in the Chinese language.

## Step 2

You will need to spend time listening, as well as practicing, both simple Chinese sentences, as well as vocabulary, so that you can memorize it.

Below are some tips which should help you to achieve your goals with regards to the above 2 steps.

- a. If you are able to, take a local community Chinese class as well as carrying out practice drills with a study partner. The more you are able to speak the language, then the easier it will get.
- b. Get yourself a good dictionary, and ensure it is one which has the right phonetic spellings of each word.
- c. If you can, find someone whose native language is Chinese, and spend time with them conversing in their own language. There are a lot of Chinese students now coming to the US on exchange programs that would like to spend time with Americans learning English, and will in return provide Americans with chances to learn and speak Chinese.
- d. Get hold of some tapes or CD's where you have to listen to, and then repeat out loud, what they have said. Also, try and get hold of some Chinese newspapers and magazines so that you can read what is contained within out loud.
- e. Sing some Chinese songs. Go to your local library, or purchase online some tapes or CD's, and then listen to them frequently

until such time as you are able to speak the words and the sentences on your own.

- f. It is important that you review all the other words you have learned previously on a regular basis so that they become fresh in your memory again.

### **Step 3**

It is important that, as well as learning to speak the Chinese language, you spend time writing it. By doing this, you will not only be able to understand the strokes and rules relating to each Chinese character, but it will also provide you with a sound foundation of just how each character is formed.

Below are some tips to help ensure that you can learn the Chinese characters.

- a. The first thing you should do in order to memorize each character is to write them down on paper until you have remembered it. You should start with the easiest ones first and then gradually build up to the much more difficult ones in the future.
- b. However, instead of writing each one down many times over, you should only write them once or twice. You should have a whole list of words in front of you, and you should go through this list writing each word once or twice, and once you have done this list, you then start from the beginning and go through it again. Do this for as many times as the course instructs you to do it. Doing this will help to ensure that the words you have learned are more firmly ensconced within your memory.

- c. Whenever possible, watch either movies, or TV programs that have Chinese subtitles. It is one of the best and easiest ways for a person to learn Chinese, through both the spoken and written word.
- d. Get some post it's and then write down particular characters you are about to learn, and place them on the objects that they relate to.

After some time, you will notice that many of these Chinese characters have some elements in common. They may be related to each other through the meaning or pronunciation of the word. By noting these common elements, you will find that it helps you to remember the characters much easier.

#### **Step 4**

This step looks at the grammar of the Chinese language, which is almost identical to that of all other languages. The only difference you may find between the Chinese and English grammar is the sequence in which it is placed. Therefore, you need to pay close attention to these differences and practice them as much as possible.

However, the most important thing to remember when learning any new language, and not just Chinese, is that you should not be afraid to make mistakes. Certainly a lot of people find it difficult to learn a language, as they are extremely self conscious and are worried that they may make mistakes, and people will laugh at them when they do.

So do not be discouraged, and remember that by practicing what you have learned, you will soon be amazed at the amount of progress you can make.

Also, in order to achieve your goals, you should allocate some time each day to carrying out your studies, and it is important that you keep to the schedule you devise for yourself. It is best if you set up a schedule where you study a little and often, rather than studying for long periods of time all in one go.

# Conclusion

In recent months, China has become big news, especially since in 2008 it will be holding the Summer Olympics. Because of the increased interest in this country, many people are now considering that it may be important that they start to learn the Chinese language. Certainly many schools across the US and around the globe are offering students the chance to learn Mandarin Chinese instead of, say, German, French or Spanish.

Certainly there are a number of reasons as to why more and more people are considering learning Chinese. Certainly those young professionals, or those who are career minded, are starting to see the benefits to be gained from learning this language. Below are a few other reasons that are contributing to the rise of interest in learning Chinese:

1. Because China has been admitted to the WTO (World Trade Organization), this has resulted in their economy booming, and therefore people now need to interact with them on a regular basis.
2. Today in the US, when it comes to learning a new language, more and more people are enrolling on courses to learn Chinese. Today, the enrolment courses have reached an all time high, and a bill was introduced in the US that students at high school could be provided with Chinese language classes.
3. By being able to speak Chinese, a person will set themselves apart from others and

show that they are proactive. By doing this, not only will you be able to compete with those people who have just graduated, but also you will be able to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise in the future as trade with China also increases.

4. The Chinese work force is one of the best in the world for carrying out labor intensive jobs. This results in much lower costs with regard to the products that they produce. Many of these manufacturing companies in China now employ foreigners to manage, as well as act as consultants, and also employ them as accountants. By learning Chinese, you will then help to provide a link that can be used between the various manufacturing companies in China, and American businesses.
5. Many companies are now looking to sell their products in China, and currently around 16,000 American companies are now selling their products to the Chinese. In fact, the Chinese people are hungry for consumer products, and certainly those produced abroad. It is these companies who are selling their products to China who will need those who are able to speak and write the language, in order for them to gain a foothold in this very lucrative market.
6. When it actually comes to learning Chinese, it is not as hard as you may think. Because of modern technology, the learning process can be extremely helpful. In fact, a lot of professionals have already found that they can speak the language without actually having to learn how to write it. It is learning to write the characters which often

takes up a lot of people's time when learning this particular language. In fact, the computer can actually help you when it comes to writing the Chinese language, as there are software programs now available which will convert the English word in to Chinese, and you do not even need to change your keyboard.

By using the right approach, a person can soon find themselves speaking Chinese in a very short period of time. Learning this language or any other language can provide you with benefits that will help to advance your career in the future. But it will actually take you less time to learn this language, instead of getting a degree or learning another skill.