

# Daily Language Focus: Intro to Pinyin and Tones

## Initials

The following initial sounds are very similar in both English and Chinese:

**b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, p, s, t, w, y**

Initials which are different from English are as follows:

Pinyin	Description of Sound
z	<i>dz</i> sound, as in suds
c	<i>ts</i> sound, as in cats
zh	heavy <i>j</i> sound, as in John, jug, or jog
ch	heavy <i>ch</i> , as in church
sh	heavy <i>sh</i> sound, as in shop
r	heavy <i>r</i> sound, strongly emphasizing the beginning of really
q	light <i>ch</i> sound
x	light <i>sh</i> sound

## Simple Endings

Pinyin	Description of Sound
a	like the <i>ahh</i> you say when the doctor tells you to "open wide"
an	like the English word "on" with a Michigan accent
ang	like most people pronounce Hong Kong
e	like <i>ugh</i>
en	like the <i>un</i> in undo
eng	like the <i>ung</i> in hung
i	like the <i>ee</i> in sheep; following <i>zh, ch, sh, or r</i> somewhat like <i>r</i> ; following <i>z, c, and s</i> not pronounced at all
in	like <i>een</i> in keen, not kin
ing	like <i>ing</i> in sing
o	like <i>oo-uh</i> said very quickly
ou	like <i>oh</i>
ong	like <i>oh + ng</i>
u	like <i>oo</i> ; following <i>y, j, q, or x</i> , like <i>ee</i> with rounded lips (ü)
un	like <i>oo + un</i> in undo
ün	ü + n

# Daily Language Focus: Intro to Pinyin and Tones

## Complex Endings

Pinyin	Description of Sound
ao	like <i>ow</i> in <i>cow</i>
ei	like <i>ay</i> in <i>pay</i>
ia	like a cowboy saying “ <i>yee-ahh</i> ”, very fast
ian	like the Japanese money <i>yen</i>
iang	like <i>ee</i> + <i>ahng</i>
iao	like <i>yow</i> in <i>yowzer</i>
ie	like <i>ee</i> + <i>eh</i>
iu	like <i>ee</i> + <i>oo</i> , similar to English “ <i>you</i> ”
ua	like <i>oo</i> + <i>ah</i>
uai	like <i>oo</i> + English word “ <i>l</i> ” (or pinyin “ <i>ai</i> ”)
uan	like <i>oo</i> + Michigan “ <i>on</i> ”; or Spanish name “ <i>Juan</i> ” without <i>h</i> at beginning
ui	like English word “ <i>way</i> ”
uo	same as “ <i>o</i> ” in simple endings!
ue	like <i>ü</i> + <i>eh</i>
uan	like <i>ü</i> + English <i>en</i> ( <i>not pinyin</i> )

Content adapted from *Survival Chinese Lessons* by Joann Pittman

## Troublemakers

- *i*
  - Silent after *z*, *c*, *s*, *r*
  - Like the *r* in *grr* after *zh*, *ch*, *sh*, *r*
- *er*
  - An *r* sound often added to the end of words in northern China (especially Beijing)
- *ü*
  - Only occurs after *n*, *l*, *j*, *q*, *x*, and *y*
- *ou*
  - Like the English “*oh*”, often confused with pinyin *uo*

# Daily Language Focus: Intro to Pinyin and Tones

## Tones

### First Tone

The first tone is high and flat. Some feel that it sounds "robotic" because it is monotone. The first tone can also be a bit longer in duration compared to the other three tones. (This helps make it more obvious to the listener that the tone is flat.)

### Second Tone

The second tone is rising. Some feel that it sounds like you're asking a question, and if that helps you make the tone properly in the beginning, do it!

### Third Tone

The third tone is low. It is often called the "falling-rising" tone or the "dipping" tone, but it's more important that the tone be super low than that it rises. Keep it low!

### Fourth Tone

The fourth tone is falling. To many learners, it sounds angry. Several 4th tones in a row might sound like an angry staccato to you. Don't be afraid to emphasize the 4th tone by making it sound a little angry. The 4th tone also tends to be shorter in duration than the other three tones.

### Fifth Tone

This tone has subtle differences depending on the tone that comes before it (see link\* below for more information), but we won't cover that here. Just keep it short and light. Don't emphasize it.

Source: [https://resources.allsetlearning.com/chinese/pronunciation/Four\\_tones](https://resources.allsetlearning.com/chinese/pronunciation/Four_tones)

\*See also: [https://resources.allsetlearning.com/chinese/pronunciation/Neutral\\_tone](https://resources.allsetlearning.com/chinese/pronunciation/Neutral_tone)

## Mandarin Chinese Tone Countours (updated practical depiction)

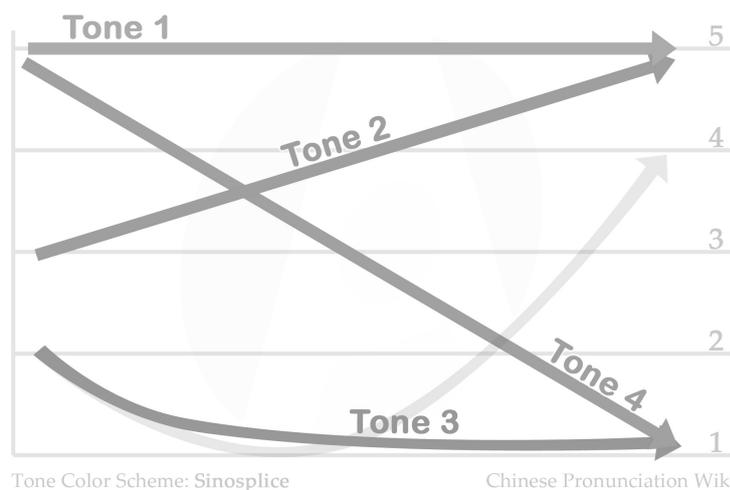


Image source: [https://resources.allsetlearning.com/chinese/pronunciation/File:Tone-Contours\\_low3rd\\_Sinosplice.png](https://resources.allsetlearning.com/chinese/pronunciation/File:Tone-Contours_low3rd_Sinosplice.png)