

UNDERSTANDING PINYIN

A pinyin word is divided into two parts: An **initial**, which begins the word, and a **final**, which ends the word. However, initials can be words on their own.

When a final stands on its own as a word and begins with "i" or "u," the "i" becomes a "y" and the "u" becomes a "w." **For example:** "ia" would become "ya." "uo" would become "wo."

| INITIALS | FINALS |
|--|---|
| B, P, M F D, T, N, L, G, K, H J, Q, X ZH, CH, SH, R Z, C, S Y AND W | ao, ai, ao e, ei i, ia, ie, iu (iou), iao, ian o, ou u, ua, ui (uei), un, uo, uai an, en, in ang, eng, ing, ong iang, iong, uan, uang, |

Pronunciation Tips

INITIALS

b, p, m, f

These initials sound much like the English letters b, p, m, and f, except when combined with the final "o." Bo, po, fo and mo should sound like they are missing a "w," i.e. bwo, pwo, fwo and mwo. Listen carefully to these sounds in the accompanying videos.

d, t, n, l, g, k, h

These initials sound much like the English letters d, t, n, l, g, k, and h, except they are produced towards the back of the throat and use more breath.

j: "gee" q: "chee" x: "shee"

The tongue is not curled for these sounds.

zh: "jr" ch: "chr" sh: "shr" r: Very unlike the English "r." "R" sounds more like the "s" in Asia or the "J" in Jacque.

The tongue should be curled towards the roof of your mouth when saying any of these 4 initials. The tongue is in the exact same position for all four initials.

z: "dz" c: "ts" as in "cats" s: Think of a snake hissing... "ss."

Your tongue should be near or touching your front teeth for these letters.

y: "ee" w: "oo" (NOT "yee" or "woo")

These letters have the same pronunciation as the finals "i" and "u."

FINALS

a: "ah" as in "father."

The letter "a" has different sounds depending on what final it is part of.

ai: "ai" as in "aisle"

ao: "ow" as in "cow," but softer, and don't close your lips when saying it.

an: "un" as in sun.

This "a" is very different than the English "a" sound.

ang: "ahng"

This final has a long "aaah" sound in it, as if you are at the dentist. Try saying the word "long" with a big smile. Then you will hear the "ang" sound.

e: "uh" as in "bun" or sometimes said like the "e" in "yet."

ei: "ei" as in "eight"

en: "en" as in taken.

eng: "ung" as in "lung."

i: "ee" as in the Spanish "i."

ia: "yah"

It's important to emphasize the "aah" sound at the end of this final, imagine you are at the dentist saying "aaah."

ie: "ye" as in "yet."

iu: "yo"

This final was originally spelled "iou," later the "o" was dropped.

iao: "yow," but softer.

ian: "yen"

The "a" in this final sounds like the "e" in yet.

iang: "yahng"

Once again emphasize the "aah" to sound like you are at the dentist.

in: "ine" as in "machine."

The "n" in *an*, *en* and *in* is said with the tip of your tongue touching the back of your front teeth. So, it sounds softer than an English "n." At times, it is hard to hear a Chinese person say "n" because it is so soft.

ing: "ing" as in "laughing," but softer.

Chinese people don't pronounce the "ing" as hard as Americans do. Sometimes, it sounds so soft it is difficult to hear them say it.

iong: "yohng"

This final sounds just like "ong," but it starts with a "y" sound.

o: like the "o" in "soft."

Keep your lips open when saying the end of this sound.

ong: "ohng"

Listen carefully to its pronunciation in the accompanying video. It is nasal and very different from English. It includes a long "oh" sound.

ou: "oh"

You should close your lips at the end of this sound.

u: "oo" as in choose, but sounds more hollow.

Imagine that your mouth is full of marbles while saying it.

ua: "wah"

It's very important to emphasize the "aah" sound at the end of this final. Pretend you are at the dentist.

ui: "way"

This final originally was spelled "uei," then the "e" was dropped.

un: "wun"

uo: "wo" as in wok.

uai: "why."

uan: "wan" as in "wand."

The "n" is said with the tongue at the front of the mouth, touching the front teeth.

uang: "wahng"

Again, think of being at the dentist... "aah"!

ü üe üan & ün: The ü sound does not exist in English. Please Note: The supplementary materials on the Lesson page will also go far in helping you pronounce these unique sounds correctly.