

What Is Pinyin?

Pinyin (拼音) is the main and official system for pronunciation and romanization of Chinese characters. The system makes pronouncing a character easier and makes your job, as a learner, easier.

Using pinyin when you are just starting out is recommended and learning the pinyin of each new character is a recommended technique to learn how to pronounce such character but as you continue on in learning Chinese, constant-dependence on pinyin is not helpful.

Pinyin is composed of four tones and one neutral tone as well as one altered tone, usually above a “u” and looks like this ŭ.

The first tone, signaled by a flat line/dash over the pinyin letter, is monotone and largely resembles the fifth, neutral tone.

Example: 一 (Yī)

The second tone slowly climbs in pitch and is signaled by an accent aigu or an acute accent.

Example: 学 (Xué)

The third tone is a sharp dropping pitch than a sudden, quick jump in pitch.

Example: 我 (Wǒ)

The fourth tone is also a sharp pitched sound. Represented by an accent grave.

Example: 是 (Shì)

The fifth, neutral tone is nearly identical to the first tone. It isn't represented with any accent.

Example: 吗 (Ma)

The sixth tone is not commonly used by is most seen on top of a "u" in pinyin. Looks like ŭ. The tone stays the same, as

Example: 女 (Nǚ)