

# English Grammar for Students of Chinese

***The Study Guide  
For Those Learning Chinese***

***Matthew B. Christensen***

CHINESE

# English Grammar for Students of Chinese

*The Study Guide  
for Those Learning Chinese*

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*Brigham Young University*

The Olivia and Hill Press®

## ENGLISH GRAMMAR series

Jacqueline Morton, editor

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Printed in the U.S.A.

ISBN: 978-0-934034-39-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010930232

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## TO THE STUDENT

*English Grammar for Students of Chinese* explains basic terminology and concepts of English grammar, focusing on those aspects of grammar that are most applicable to learning Chinese. Once you understand the terms and concepts as they apply to your own language, it will be easier for you to understand what is being introduced in your textbook and by your teacher.

This handbook supplements your Chinese language textbook. It is not intended to teach Chinese or to replace any Chinese language learning materials.

### TIPS FOR LEARNING CHINESE

Chinese is not linguistically related to English and it is culturally distant from the Western world. As such, when learning Chinese words you will not have roots similar to English to help you memorize. Moreover, Chinese words are represented by visual symbols rather than by an alphabetic writing system representing sounds. Learning to speak Chinese, to understand Chinese, to read Chinese and to write Chinese are independent tasks requiring different learning techniques.

The following tips will help you be more efficient and effective in your study of Chinese.

- Before doing an assignment read the sections in *English Grammar* that cover the topics you are going to study in your textbook.
- Read the grammar section in your Chinese textbook, taking notes on whatever you do not understand so you can ask your teacher for clarification.
- Focus on the function of the pattern, such as patterns used “to make a comparison” or “to indicate that an action has occurred.”
- Study how the grammar applies to the Chinese examples given in your textbook.
- Read the Chinese examples out loud until you have memorized them. Writing them out will also help you remember them.

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- Make up your own sentences or dialogues to illustrate the grammar rule (check with your teacher to make sure your sentences are correct).
- Use the new grammar patterns when you are speaking in class and in your homework assignments. The best way to learn grammar is to use it.

**Memorization** — Chinese requires a great deal of memorization of characters, vocabulary and sounds that are very foreign to our ears. To be effective, memorization requires concentration. Short repeated practice in daily sessions is more effective than occasional longer sessions.

### **Learning vocabulary**

Flash cards are a good, handy tool for learning new words and their meaning. You can carry them with you, group them as you wish and add information as you advance. Creating your own flash cards is an important first step in learning vocabulary.

1. On one side, write the Chinese word in Chinese characters. Make sure you focus on words, whether they are one or more characters.
2. On the other side of the card, write the following:
  - the pinyin of the word so you have an idea of how to pronounce it. Pinyin is a close approximation of Chinese pronunciation. For accurate pronunciation you will have to rely on audio materials (see below).
  - the English equivalent could be several words or an explanation
  - a short sentence in Chinese using the word or expression. Learning the word in context is particularly important since there is often no direct English–Chinese equivalent.
  - a personal note or memory aid to help you remember the Chinese word
3. Study the words and their meaning until you can go back and forth between Chinese and English, English and Chinese, and pinyin and characters.
4. Always try to use new words in your written homework assignments.

### Learning Chinese characters

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There is no magic formula for learning Chinese characters. You must spend time every day practicing them; cramming the night before a quiz does not work. Again, consistency is the key. In the initial stages, writing out characters by hand is an effective way to remembering and recognizing them. The following strategies are effective:

1. Write out individual characters 15-20 times. First by copying, then from memory. This gives you a feel for the shape of the character, the stroke order, and the components that comprise the character.
2. Write out the Chinese dialogue or sentences in characters several times. This will help you learn how the words are used in context.
3. Look at the dialogue in pinyin, and write out the characters from memory. This will help you make the connection between how to say the words and how to write them.
4. Make sure you take time to review characters learned previously. This can easily be done with flash cards.

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### Hearing and speaking Chinese

Remember that pinyin is only a close approximation of Chinese pronunciation. To learn to distinguish and pronounce Chinese sounds you have to have regular exposure to an audio program or a teacher. If you have access to an audio program in your Chinese learning materials, follow this strategy:

1. Listen to the Chinese word or dialogue.
2. Repeat out loud mimicking the pronunciation on the audio.
3. If you are not sure if your pronunciation is correct, record your repetitions and compare them to the model on the audio program.
4. Once you feel comfortable repeating the expressions, simulate performing the dialogue: play the first expression, stop the recording, then respond with the next expression, and so on.
5. Finally, practice saying the entire dialogue until you can perform it accurately and fluently. When you first begin your study of Chinese, this may be slow going, but once you get the hang of it, it will get easier.

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In a written passage or dialogue do not write words in pinyin above the characters. This would lead you to refer to pinyin instead of the characters when called upon to perform in class. If you feel you must have pinyin to help you remember the characters, write it off to the side so you can cover it up and retain an uncluttered and authentic written passage.

### **Reading Chinese**

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Make it a practice to read Chinese everyday. At the beginning this may entail nothing more than reading the sentences, dialogues, and reading passages in your textbook. Later you should add reading material from other sources.

**CAREFUL** — Grammar and vocabulary are only the basic components used to communicate. You will have to learn when and how to use the proper grammar patterns and vocabulary from your Chinese textbook and your teacher.

## WHAT IS AN ADVERB?

An **ADVERB** is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. It indicates manner, time, place, quantity, or degree (see *What is a Verb?*, p. 23 and *What is an Adjective?*, p. 86).

Xiaoqi drives *well*.

verb    adverb  
describes the verb *drive*, how Xiaoqi drives

The boat is *very* big.

adverb    adjective  
describes the adjective *big*, how big

I ate *too* *quickly*.

adverb    adverb  
describes the adverb *quickly*, how quickly

### IN ENGLISH

There are different types of adverbs:

- adverbs of manner — answer the question *how*? These adverbs are the most common and they are easy to recognize because they end with *-ly*.

Zhongshu sings *beautifully*.

The economy recovered *rapidly*.

- adverbs of time — answer the question *when*?

They will arrive *soon*.

The guest arrived *late*.

- adverbs of place — answer the question *where*?

Leave your shoes *there*.

The teacher looked *around*.

- adverbs of quantity or degree — answer the question *how much*? or *to what extent*?

He sleeps *little* these days.

They *always* eat at home.

Notice in the examples above that the adverb can be placed before or after the word described.

### IN CHINESE

As in English, Chinese has adverbs that describe verbs. However, English adverbs that describe adjectives or stative verbs are called **INTENSIFIERS** and are discussed separately (see pp. 82-3).

Chinese adverbs are usually placed before the verb, and occasionally before the subject (see *What is a Subject?*, p. 15).

- adverbs of time — usually placed before the verb

Tā **zuótiān** lái le zhèr.

tā = he/she

zuótiān = yesterday adverb

lái = to come verb

+ **le** completed action aspect marker

zhèr = here

*He/she came here yesterday.*

- adverbs of place — always placed before the verb. The pattern is the following: subject [+ time expression] + place + verb + object.

Wǒ **zuótiān zài túshūguǎn** kàn shū.

wǒ = I subject

zuótiān = yesterday time expression

zài = at place

túshūguǎn = library } place

kàn = to read verb

shū = book object

*I read a book yesterday at the library.*

Tā **zài sùshè** kàn diànshì.

tā = he/she subject

zài = at place

sùshè = dorm } place

kàn = to watch verb

diànshì = television object

*He/she watched television at the dorm.*

Some English adverbs are expressed by Chinese adjectives.

- English adverbs of manner → Chinese adjectives placed before the verb. The pattern depends on the number of syllables of the adjective.
  - a) one syllable → adjective repeated twice + modification particle **de** + verb

Tā màn màn de pǐnzhe chá.

tā = he/she

màn = slow

one-syllable adjective

màn = slow

one-syllable adjective

80

de

modification particle

pǐn = to taste

verb

+ zhe progressive aspect marker

chá = tea

*He/she tasted the tea slowly [savored the tea].*

b) two syllables → adjective + modification particle **de** + verb

Lèle zài rènzhēn de xuéxí.

Lèle = Lele

90

zài progressive aspect marker

rènzhēn = conscientious

two-syllable adjective

de

modification particle

xuéxí = to study

verb

*Lele studies conscientiously.*

- English adverbs of quantity or degree → Chinese adjectives placed after the verb. The pattern is the following: verb + modification particle **de** + adjective regardless of the number of syllables.

Wáng Lì xiě de bù cuò.

100

Wáng Lì = Wang Li

xiě = to write

verb

de

modification particle

bù negative marker = not

cuò = wrong

one-syllable adjective

*Wang Li writes well.*

Xiǎo Líng shuō de hěn liúlì.

xiǎo = little

Líng = Ling

shuō = to speak

verb

de

modification particle

hěn = very (see p. 82)

liúlì = fluent

multi-syllable adjective

110

*Xiao Ling speaks fluently.*

**CAREFUL** — Consult your textbook since different patterns have different meanings. For example:

- adjective + modification particle **de** + verb → describes how an action is/was carried out

Tā màn màn de zǒu.

tā = he/she

màn = slow

+ màn = slow

de

zǒu = to walk

one-syllable adjective

one-syllable adjective

modification particle

verb

*He/she was walking slowly.*

- verb + modification particle **de** + adjective shows the result of the action

Tā zǒu de hěn màn.

tā = he/she

zǒu = to walk

de

hěn = very (see p. 82)

màn = slow

verb

modification particle

adjective

*He/she walked slowly.*

## INTENSIFIERS

English adverbs that describe adjectives are known as intensifiers in Chinese. Common intensifiers include the following English adverbs: *very, truly, really, so, completely, extremely, quite, especially*, etc. The intensifier **hěn** meaning *very* is always used before a verbal adjective, however, it is considered a "weak" version of the word and usually not translated in English.

As English adverbs, most Chinese intensifiers precede the adjective or adverb described, however, a few follow the adjective or adverb described. Here is an example of two intensifiers that precede the adjective described.

Tā jīntiān fēicháng máng.

tā = he/she

jīntiān = today

fēicháng = very

máng = busy

intensifier

verbal adjective

*He/she is extremely busy today.*

Tā de mèimèi zhēn piàoliàng.

tā = he/she

+ **de** possessive particle → his/her

mèimèi = younger sister

zhēn = really

piàoliàng = pretty

intensifier

verbal adjective

*His/her younger sister is really pretty.*

Here is an example of an intensifier that follows the adjective.

Nà běn shū hǎo jíle.

nà = that

**běn** classifier for bound objects

shū = book

hǎo = good

adjective

jíle = extremely

intensifier

*That book is extremely good.*

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In Chinese, intensifiers can also be used to describe stative verbs (see p. 23 in *What is a Verb?*).

Wǒmen tèbié zūnjìng nà ge lǎoshī.

wǒ = I

+ **men** plural marker → we

tèbié = especially

intensifier

zūnjìng = to respect

stative verb

nà = that

**ge** general classifier

lǎoshī = teacher

*We especially respect that teacher.*

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Consult your textbook for a list of the few intensifiers that follow the adjective or adverb.

**Page 75**

- l. 37 下雪的话，就不去。  
l. 51 你去中国的话，就帮我买一本中文词典。

**Page 77**

- l. 56 他偷了我的自行车。  
l. 64 我的自行车被他偷了。  
l. 72 他的弟弟打坏了他的电脑。

**Page 78**

- l. 81 他的电脑叫他的弟弟打坏了。  
l. 91 老师批评了学生。  
l. 97 学生被老师批评了。

**Page 80**

- l. 46 他昨天来了这儿。  
l. 56 我昨天在图书馆看书。  
l. 64 他在宿舍看电视。

**Page 81**

- l. 77 他慢慢地品着茶。  
l. 89 乐乐在认真地学习。  
l. 100 王力写得不错。  
l. 106 小玲说得很流利。

**Page 82**

- l. 118 他慢慢地走。  
l. 127 他走得很慢。  
l. 146 他今天非常忙。  
l. 151 他的妹妹真漂亮。

**Page 83**

- l. 159 那本书好极了。  
l. 168 我们特别尊敬那个老师。

**Page 84**

- l. 16 你住哪儿？  
l. 21 你什么时候回来？  
l. 28 你怎么回来？  
l. 33 你为什么回来了？

**Page 87**

- l. 55 蓝色的自行车是我的。  
l. 62 大的字典在桌子上。

**Page 88**

- l. 78 他很漂亮。  
l. 84 那个老师很好。  
l. 100 这个书包很重。  
l. 110 陈容是一个艺术家。

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