

# 基础三 · Light syllables and common tone changes

## Chinese Foundations

### Why 你好 does not sound like two full dips

Written pinyin often shows **nǐ hǎo**, but the first syllable sounds rising in ordinary speech: approximately **ní hǎo**. The written word and its spoken tone in a phrase need not look identical. Learn the base tone and practise the phrase together.

### Neutral tone is light, not a fixed fifth tone

妈妈 māma, mother; 谢谢 xièxie, thank you; 爸爸 bàba, father.

The second syllable is unstressed and normally shorter. Its pitch depends partly on the preceding tone; it is not always lower or simply a full tone whispered quietly. Compare whole words with a Mandarin model. The particle 吗 ma is also normally neutral in an ordinary yes-no question.

### 不 before a fourth tone

不 has base reading bù. Before a fourth-tone syllable it is commonly pronounced bú: 不是 bú shì, is not; 不去 bú qù, not go. Before other full tones it normally stays bù: 不喝 bù hē, not drink; 不好 bù hǎo, not good. Some weak forms have further changes in natural speech; these examples teach the main contrast.

### 一 in useful phrases

| Context                            | Common spoken reading | Example                                                          |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alone, counting, or in 第一          | yī                    | 一 yī; 第一 dì-yī, first                                            |
| Before fourth tone                 | yí                    | 一次 yí cì, once                                                   |
| Before first, second or third tone | yì                    | 一天 yì tiān, one day; 一年 yì nián, one year; 一本 yì běn, one volume |

A lightly pronounced 个 in 一个 can obscure the following tone; learn 一个 yí ge as a common whole phrase. Spelling conventions differ on whether to show changed tones for 一 and 不. Here the phrase readings show ordinary surface pronunciation; dictionary forms remain useful for lookup.

## Two third tones and longer groups

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In 很好 hěnhǎo, very good, the first third tone becomes rising in the two-syllable group: approximately hénhǎo. Keep the base tones when identifying the words. With three or more third tones, grouping and speech rhythm matter; do not change every third tone mechanically from left to right.

## Listen, imitate, compare

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Record 不是, 一天 and 你好 separately, then in a short message. Identify the base tones and predict the main change before listening. A written prediction checks your understanding of the rule; a listener must hear your recording to assess how you said it.

## A fresh situation

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**R1. Interpret and repair.** Someone says neutral tone is always lower than the preceding syllable. What should you change in that explanation?

**R2. Use it yourself.** Give the base reading and common phrase reading of 不 in 不是 and 一 in 一天. Explain what happens in 你好.

Write your responses before opening the key. Compare meaning as well as form; a different valid answer need not copy the model.

## Answers and explanations

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Check after your attempt. For open tasks, compare the message and the stated criteria, then revise one detail.

### ■ Fresh-situation answers

**R1.** Neutral syllables are unstressed and usually shorter; their pitch depends on the preceding tone and context. They are not always lower and have no single fixed contour.

**R2. One possible response.** 不 has base bù and is commonly bú before shì; 一 has base yī and is yì before tiān. In nǐ hǎo the first third tone sounds rising in the two-syllable group. Base forms and surface readings serve different purposes.

### ■ Recall later

Tomorrow, predict three phrase readings before listening to their models.