基础四 · Read pinyin without English guesses

Chinese Foundations

Read a new word without an English guess

You see **去 qù**, go, on your word card. The q is not English k, and its written u represents the rounded front vowel ü. Learn the spelling rule with the sound; neither an English respelling nor a letter name is enough.

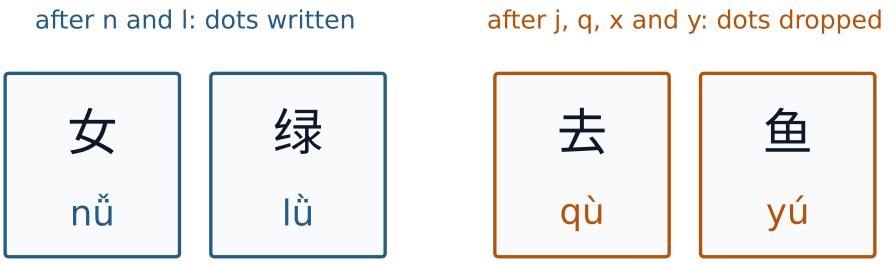
Place the tongue, then add air

Initial	Starting guide	Example
j	front of tongue near the hard palate; unaspirated affricate	鸡 jī, chicken
q	similar place to j, with aspiration	七 qī, seven
x	similar front-palate area, continuous friction	西 xī, west
z / c	tongue near the teeth; c adds aspiration	字 zì, character; 词 cí, word
zh / ch / sh	tongue tip farther back; ch is aspirated	知 zhī, know; 吃 chī, eat; 诗 shī, poem

The table gives physical cues, not English sound equivalents. Compare j/q as well as z/c and zh/ch. Keep r separate too: **人 rén**, person. Ask a teacher to check the contrast rather than assuming an English r is identical.

ü keeps its sound when dots disappear

Make an ee-like tongue position, then round the lips without moving the tongue back. Compare **女 nǚ**, female, with **努 nǔ**, strive. After n and l the dots distinguish words: nǚ, lǜ. After j, q, x and the spelling letter y, the dots are omitted: **去 qù**, **鱼 yú**. Their u still represents ü in these spellings.



Same rounded ü sound in all four; only the spelling changes.

Understand the shortened finals

After an initial, iou, uei and uen are normally written **iu**, **ui** and **un**: **九 jiǔ**, nine; **水 shuǐ**, water; **论 lùn**, discuss. The spelling does not mean that an internal sound has simply vanished. Other spelling rules apply when the syllable has no initial: for example, you, wei and wen.

The last-vowel marking in liù and shuǐ follows the tone-mark convention. Split **谢谢 xièxie** into xiè + xie, notice the light second syllable, and practise the whole word. Avoid invented English spellings such as “ssh-yeh”, which can reinforce the wrong tongue position.

A fresh situation

R1. Interpret and repair. A learner reads qù with English k and a back u vowel. Identify both problems.

R2. Use it yourself. Write the normal pinyin spelling for 女 and 去, then identify the full finals behind jiǔ and shuǐ.

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

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

■ Fresh-situation answers

R1. Q is an aspirated front-palate affricate, not English k. After q the written u represents ü with its dots omitted. Compare the tongue position and aspiration with a model.

R2. One possible response. Nǚ keeps the dots after n; qù omits them after q. Jiǔ represents the shortened iou final and shuǐ the shortened uei final. Correct spelling is a first step, not a pronunciation score.

Recall later. Later, compare nǚ/nǔ and j/q with a listener, recording one feature at a time.