

Basic Chinese Grammar - Index

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Chinese Grammar - Personal pronouns

The most common personal pronouns in Chinese are:

我	wǒ	I	他	tā	he
你	nǐ	you (informal)	她	tā	she
您	nín	you (formal) ^{[1][4]}	它	tā	it ^[2]

我们	wǒmen	we	他们	tāmen	they
咱们	zánmen	we ^[3]	她们	tāmen	they
你们	nǐmen	you	它们	tāmen	they

Notes:

- [1] 您 is used to show respect explicitly (to superiors, customers, older people). Where there is no need to emphasise respect 你 is used instead.
- [2] 它 and 它们 are used much less than 'it' or 'they' in English. Where the reference is obvious 它/它们 is usually omitted.
- [3] 咱们 is used by the speaker to explicitly include the listener as a member of 'we'. It can always be replaced with the more neutral 我们.
- [4] There is no plural form for 您. Instead a measure word and numeral is used:

您二位	nín èr wèi	the two of you	您几位?	nín jǐ wèi	how many are you?
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Chinese Grammar - Personal pronouns

Examples:

我是学生。	wǒ shì xuésheng	I am a student.
你也是学生吗?	nǐ yě shì xuésheng ma	Are you also a student?
他是老师。	tā shì lǎoshī	He is a teacher.
她是教授。	tā shì jiàoshòu	She is a professor.
我们是中国入。	wǒmen shì zhōngguórén	We are Chinese. (including or excluding the listener)
咱们走吧!	zánmen zǒu ba!	Let's go! (including the listener)
你们是英国人吗?	nǐmen shì yīngguórén	Are you English?
他们是美国人。	tāmen shì měiguórén	They are Americans.
她们是歌手。	tāmen shì gēshǒu	They (group of women) are singers.
这是她的花朵。它们很漂亮。	zhè shì tā de huāduǒ. tāmen hěn piàoliang	These are her flowers. They are beautiful. (它们 would usually be omitted.)

Chinese Grammar - 们 (men) plurals

们 is a plural suffix. It is only used with nouns or pronouns that refer to people. It cannot be used in noun phrases that contain a numeral or a quantifier.

我 -> 我们	wǒmen	we
老师 -> 老师们	lǎoshīmen	teachers
女士们, 先生们	nǚshìmen, xiānshēngmen	Ladies and gentlemen

You cannot say:

*我的班有二十五个学生们。	wǒ de bān yǒu èrshíwǔ gè xuéshengmen.	My class has twenty-five pupils.
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Instead say:

我的班有二十五个学生。	wǒ de bān yǒu èrshíwǔ gè xuésheng.	My class has twenty-five pupils.
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Chinese Grammar - Questions

Use the following interrogative pronouns ask questions:

who?	谁	shéi
when?	什么时候	shénme shíhòu
what?	什么	shénme
why?	为什么	wèishénme
where?	哪里, 哪儿	nǎlǐ, nǎr
how?	怎么样	zěnmeyàng
how many?	几, 多少	jǐ [for up to ten], duōshǎo [ten and more]
how long?	多少时间, 多久	duōshǎo shíjiān, duōjiǔ

Chinese Grammar - Questions

Note that the interrogative pronoun appears in place of that part of the sentence, that the pronoun asks about.
Examples:

谁住在北京?	shéi zhù zài běijīng	Who lives in Beijing?
他什么时候来北京?	tā shénme shíhòu lái běijīng	When will he come to Beijing?
他干什么?	tā gān shénme	What does he do?
他为什么坐飞机?	tā wèishénme zuò fēijī	Why is he taking the plane?
他住在哪里?	tā zhù zài nǎlǐ	Where does he live?
他学中文学得怎么样?	tā xué zhōngwén xué de zěnmeyàng	How does he learn Chinese?
他有几个兄弟?	tā yǒu jǐ gè xiōngdì	How many brothers does he have?
他有多少钱?	tā yǒu duōshǎo qián	How much money does he have?
他住在北京多少时间了?	tā zhù zài běijīng duōshǎo shíjiān le	How long did he live in Beijing?

Chinese Grammar - Questions

To ask if something is the case add 吗 (ma) to a statement:

他是老师。 -> 他是老师吗?	tā shì lǎoshī. -> tā shì lǎoshī ma?	He is a teacher. Is he a teacher?
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or use an affirmative / negative structure:

他是老师。 -> 他是不是老师?	tā shì lǎoshī. -> tā shì bú shì lǎoshī ma?	He is a teacher. Is he a teacher?
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You can also form a follow-up question with 呢 (ne):

我是学生, 你呢?	wǒ shì xuésheng, nǐ ne?	I am a student, and you?
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Chinese Grammar - Adjectives, 很 and 的

Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

大	dà	large	小	xiǎo	small	好	hǎo	good	老	lǎo	old	快	kuài	fast
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Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

干净	gānjìng	clean	聪明	cōngmíng	clever	糊涂	hútu	confuse
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Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

一座大房子	一个小孩子	好主意	老人	一辆快车
yī zuò dà fángzi	yī gè xiǎo háiizi	hǎo zhǔyì	lǎo rén	yī liàng kuài chē
a large house	a small child	good idea	old people	a fast car

Multiple syllable adjectives are linked to the noun with 的:

一个聪明的姑娘	一篇糊涂的文章	一间干净的厨房
yī gè cōngmíng de gūniang	yī piān hútu de wénzhāng	yī jiān gānjìng de chúfáng
a clever girl	a confused essay	a clean kitchen

Chinese Grammar - Adjectives, 很 and 的

If the adjective is used predicatively there is no need to use 是 (shì). For this reason some grammars use the term **stative verb** instead of adjective. With single syllable adjectives:

孩子小	hǎizi xiǎo	the child is small	书大	shū dà	the book is large
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with multiple syllable adjectives 很 hěn, very is used:

房子很宽敞。	fángzi hěn kuānchǎng	The house is spacious.	老师很聪明。	lǎoshī hěn cōngmíng	The teacher is clever.
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NB: 很 in this context loses its meaning 'very' unless it is especially emphasised.

Chinese Grammar - 是 and 有

是 'to be' is used to link a subject and object.

他是我的老师。	tā shì wǒde lǎoshī	He is my teacher.
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Note: In Chinese, adjectives (sometimes called stative verbs) do not need the word '是'.

她很聪明。	tā hěn cōngmíng	She is very clever.	Not: 她是很聪明。
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有 'to have' is used to express ownership or existence.

她有一个弟弟。	tā yǒu yī gè dìdì	She has a younger brother.
^[1] 这里没有超市。	zhèlǐ méi yǒu chāoshì	There is no supermarket here.

and there are some fixed expression with 有:

有意思	yǒuyìsi	interesting
有钱	yǒuqián	rich

^[1] 有 is always negated with 没 (méi) - 没有 (méiyǒu) to not have

Chinese Grammar - Adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs. They appear in front of the word they modify.

Common adverbs are:

Adverbs of time			Adverbs of quantity		
才	cái	only now	都	dōu	all
常	cháng	often	只	zhǐ	only
刚	gāng	just now	总	zǒng	altogether
已经	yǐjīng	already	全	quán	total
马上	mǎshàng	immediately	也	yě	also
就	jiù	immediately, only, exactly	Adverbs of frequency		
Adverbs of degree			又	yòu	again (relates to past events)
很	hěn	very	再	zài	again
更	gèng	more	Adverbs of negation		
最	zuì	most	不	bù	not
太	tài	too, very	没	méi	not (have)
非常	fēicháng	extraordinary	别	bié	(must) not

Chinese Grammar - Prepositions(locations)

Prepositions (Time, Location and Direction)

Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

在	zài	in, at	自从	zìcóng	since	从	cóng	from
到	dào	to	向	xiàng	towards	沿	yán	along
朝	cháo	towards	往	wǎng	towards	离	lí	distant from

Examples:

他在中国学习。	tā zài zhōngguó xuéxí	He is studying in China.
他从英国回去了。	tā cóng yīngguó huí qù le	He returned home from England.
他从香港到北京去旅行了。	tā cóng xiānggǎng dào běijīng qù lǚxíng le	He travelled from Hong Kong to Beijing.
自从毕业他就在美国工作。	zìcóng bìyè tā jiù zài měiguó gōngzuò	Since he graduated he has been working in the States.
他们朝南走。	tāmen cháo nán zǒu	They are heading south.

.../cont

Chinese Grammar - Prepositions(locations)

Examples: continued

这里离机场有20公里。	zhèlǐ lí jīchǎng yǒu èr shí gōnglǐ	The airport is 20 kilometres from here.
他向她转去。	tā xiàng tā zhuǎn qù	He turned to her.
他沿外滩散步。	tā yán wàitān sànbù	He is taking a walk along the Bund.
学生都往教室走了。	xuésheng dōu wǎng jiàoshì zǒu le	The students all headed for the classroom.

NB: 在 can function as a preposition or as a verb meaning 'to be in place'. 在 often forms fixed expression with location words:

在 ... 里	zài ... lǐ	inside	在 ... 中	zài ... zhōng	in, amongst	在 ... 上	zài ... shàng	on top of
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Examples: zài as a preposition and a verb:

她在北京学哲学。	tā zài běijīng xué zhéxué	She is studying philosophy in Beijing.
小孩子在花园里。	xiǎo háizi zài huāyuán lǐ	The child is in the garden.

Chinese Grammar - Negation

The most common way of saying that something is not the case is using 不 (bù).

我不是老师。	wǒ bù shì lǎoshī	I am not a teacher.
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With the verb 有 (yǒu) 'to have' and for events that are completed use 没 (méi) instead of 不。

我没有兄弟姐妹。	wǒ méi yǒu xiōngdìjiěmèi	I don't have brothers or sisters.
她没去图书馆。	tā méi qù túshūguǎn	She has not gone to the library.

Note: the positive form of the sentence would be 她去了图书馆。(tā qù le túshūguǎn) She has gone to the library. Since 没 already implies a completed state, the aspect marker 了 (le) is not needed.

Chinese has no simple 'yes' or 'no'. Instead, the main verb is normally repeated, with either 对 (duì) to confirm or 不 (bù) to deny added in front.

你是学生吗?	Nǐ shì xuésheng ma?	Are you a student?
是	shì	Yes.
对, 是学生	duì, shì xuésheng	Correct, (I) am a student.
不是	bù shì	No.

Chinese Grammar - Negation

To say that you agree or disagree you can say:

我同意	wǒ tóngyì	I agree	我不同意	wǒ bù tóngyì	I disagree
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Note on the pronunciation of 不:

The tone of 不 varies according to context. On its own or if 不 is followed by a syllable in the first, second or third tone, the pronunciation is bù. If 不 precedes a fourth tone 不 is pronounced in the second tone bú.

Wǒ bù xiǎngjiā (I am not homesick)	Wǒ bú shì lǎoshī (I am not a teacher)
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(However 不 is normally always written as bù even when it is pronounced in the second tone).

Chinese Grammar - Common conjunctions

和 (hé): and - 和 **can only link words and phrases, not sentences.**

Example:

她喜欢茶和咖啡。	tā xǐhuan chá hé kāfēi	She likes tea and coffee.
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或 (huò) : or - 或 **can only link words and phrases, not sentences**

或者 (huòzhě) : or - 或者 **can be used with words, phrases and sentences**

还是 (háishì) : or - 还是 **used in questions**

Examples:

我想买一瓶橙汁或一瓶苹果汁。	wǒ xiǎng mǎi yī píng chéngzhī huò yī píng píngguǒzhī.	I would like to buy a bottle of orange juice or apple juice.
我想出去跳舞或者在家看电视。	wǒ xiǎng chūqù tiàowǔ huòzhě zài jiā kàn diànshì.	I would like to go dancing or to stay at home and watch TV.
你喝茶还是咖啡?	nǐ hē chá háishì kāfēi?	Do you drink tea or coffee

Chinese Grammar - Common conjunctions

如果 (rúguǒ): if

如果我有钱，我就买一辆新车。	rúguǒ wǒ yǒuqián, wǒ jiù mǎi yī liàng xīn chē	If I had money, I would buy a new car.
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可是 (kěshi): but

我喜欢听流行音乐，可是我朋友喜欢听古典音乐。
wǒ xǐhuān tīng liúxíng yīnyuè, kěshì wǒ péngyou xǐhuān tīng gǔdiǎn yīnyuè.
I like listening to pop music, but my friend likes listening to classical music.

因为 (yīnwèi): because

我学中文，因为我要去中国旅行。	wǒ xué zhōngwén, yīnwèi wǒ yào qù zhōngguó lǚxíng.	I am studying Chinese because I want to go and travel in China.
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所以 (suǒyǐ): therefore

她太忙了，所以不出去跳舞。	tā tài máng le, suǒyǐ bù chūqù tiàowǔ.	She is very busy, therefore she can't go out dancing
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Chinese Grammar - Common conjunctions

虽然 (suīrán): although

虽然他很忙, 他还是邀请我们去他家。	suīrán tā hěn máng, tā hái shì yāoqǐng wǒmen qù tā jiā.	Although he is very busy, he has invited us to his home.
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除了 ... 以外 (chúle ... yǐwài): except

除了北京以外, 我没去过其他地方。	chúle běijīng yǐwài, wǒ méi qù guò qítā dìfang.	Apart from Beijing I have not been to any other places.
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就 (jiù): 就 is often used to create a link between the idea in the preceding clause and the current clause.

如果你想看电视, 我们就呆在家里。	rúguǒ nǐ xiǎng kàn diànshì, wǒmen jiù dāi zài jiā lǐ.	If you want to watch TV, we can stay at home.
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Chinese Grammar - Aspect

Chinese uses three particles to express the temporal aspect of a statement.

着 (zhe) indicates the action is ongoing.

了 (le) indicates the action is completed but is affecting the current state.

过 (guò) indicates that something was experienced in the past

着

老师还病着, 我们不上课。	lǎoshī hái bìngzhe, wǒmen bù shàng kè.	The teacher is still ill, we don't go to class.
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了

他回家了我们就吃晚饭。	tā huí jiā le, wǒmen jiù chī wǎnfàn.	After he came home, we had supper. After he comes home, we will have supper.
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Note: 了 marks an event as complete, but it can refer to an event in the past, the present or the future.

了 can also be used as a sentence level particle indicating a change of state.

过

我认识颐和园, 我去过北京。	wǒ rènshi yíhéyuán, wǒ qù guò běijīng.	I know the Summer Palace, I have been to Beijing.
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Chinese Grammar - Attitude

啊

啊 is used to soften the tone of an utterance or to establish an emotional link with the listener.

快来啊!	kuài lái a	Come quickly.
这个问题很困难啊!	zhè gè wèntí hěn kùnnan a	This problem is really difficult!

吧

吧 is asking for agreement or approval of an utterance or to form a polite request.

他们已经来了吧。	tāmen yǐjīng lái le ba	They must have arrived already, mustn't they.
你们渴了吧?	nǐmen kě le ba?	You must be thirsty?
不早了, 我们走吧!	bù zǎo le, wǒmen zǒu ba	It is late, let's go!

呢

呢 is used to express an expectation or to ask for additional information.

我是学生, 你呢?	wǒ shì xuésheng, nǐ ne	I am a student, and you?
昨天很热, 今天呢?	zuótiān hěn rè, jīntiān ne	It was very hot yesterday, what about today?

Chinese Grammar - Modals

Chinese uses three particles to express the temporal aspect of a statement.

会 (huì) ability, future possibility:

我会说中文。	wǒ huì shuō zhōngwén	I speak Chinese.
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能 (néng) possibility, permission:

你能不能来?	nǐ néng bù néng lái?	Can you come?
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可以 (kěyǐ) permission:

我可以在这里抽烟吗?	wǒ kěyǐ zài zhèlǐ chōuyān ma	Can I smoke here?
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要 (yào) to want, to have to, to become:

我要去中国。	wǒ yào qù zhōngguó	I want to go to China.
你要更认真地工作。	nǐ yào gèng rènzhēn dì gōngzuò	You must work more conscientiously.

想 (xiǎng) wish:

我想吃宫保鸡丁。	wǒ xiǎng chī gōngbǎojīdīng	I would like spicy diced chicken with peanuts.
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Chinese Grammar - Modals

Chinese uses three particles to express the temporal aspect of a statement.

愿意 (yuànyì) willingness:

你愿意就来吧!	nǐ yuànyì jiù lái ba	If you want you can come!
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得 (děi) must:

我得做功课。	wǒ děi zuò gōngkè	I must do my homework.
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Note: Here 得 is pronounced děi.

必须 (bìxū) must:

你必须努力工作。	nǐ bìxū nǔlì gōngzuò	You must work hard!
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应该 (yīnggāi) ought to:

你应该尊敬你的父母。	nǐ yīnggāi zūnjìng nǐ de fùmǔ	You ought to respect your parents.
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Chinese Grammar - 一下

The use of 一下

一下 is used to indicate that some action is only lasting a short while. It is often used to indicate that somebody is doing something briefly or when making a request for some help or support.

我不确定, 让我想一下。	Wǒ bù quèdìng, ràng wǒ xiǎng yīxià.	I'm not sure - let me think.
您需要什么? 我不知道。 我看一下。	Nín xūyào shénme? Wǒ bù zhīdào. Wǒ kàn yīxià.	What are you looking for? I don't know - I am only having a quick look around.
我作业做完了。 你看一下吧。	Wǒ zuòyè zuò wán le. Nǐ kàn yīxià ba.	I have finished my homework. Can you have a look, please.

Chinese Grammar - Nominal measure words

Chinese nouns, preceded either by a number, a demonstrative pronoun, or an interrogative pronoun, require a measure word before the noun. Some measure words have an English equivalent, e.g.

一束花	yī shù huā	a bunch of flowers
一群羊	yī qún yáng	a flock of sheep

Most Chinese measure words have, however, no English equivalent, e.g. 三个人 (sān gè rén) three people. The most common and generic measure word is 个 (gè). It is used with most abstract terms. Some measure words indicate a quantity and have an English equivalent:

两瓶啤酒	liǎng píng píjiǔ	two bottles of beer
一副手套	yī fù shǒutào	a pair of gloves
一块蛋糕	yī kuài dànɡāo	a slice of cake
一张纸	yī zhāng zhǐ	a piece of paper

Chinese Grammar - Nominal measure words

Most Chinese measure words have, however, no English equivalent, e.g. 三个人 (sān gè rén) three people
 The most common and generic measure word is 个 (gè). It is used with most abstract terms.
 Some measure words indicate a quantity and have an English equivalent:

张 (flat things):	一张桌子	yī zhāng zhuōzi	a table
本 (books):	一本词典	yī běn cídiǎn	a dictionary
条 (winding things):	一条裤子, 一条河	yī tiáo kùzi, yī tiáo hé	a pair of trousers, a river
篇 (paper work, documents):	一篇文章	yī piān wénzhāng	an essay
把 (something with a handle):	一把椅子, 一把雨伞	yī bǎ yǐzi, yī bǎ yǔsǎn	a chair, an umbrella

Some measure words are very specific to a particular noun 一匹马 (yī pǐ mǎ) a horse

Examples:

三个老师	sān gè lǎoshī	three teachers	六匹马	liù pǐ mǎ	six horses
这个老师	zhè gè lǎoshī	this teacher	这本书	zhè běn shū	this book
哪个老师	nǎ gè lǎoshī	what teacher?	哪把椅子	nǎ bǎ yǐzi	which chair?

Chinese Grammar - Nominal measure words

Common measure words:

个	gè	general	杯	bēi	cups, glasses
件	jiàn	clothes	架	jià	airplanes, machines
篇	piān	documents	块	kuài	cakes
瓶	píng	liquid	只	zhī	animals
把	bǎ	things with handles	本	běn	books, maps
封	fēng	letters	间	jiān	rooms
棵	kē	plants	辆	liàng	cars
位	wèi	person (more formal than 个)	座	zuò	buildings, mountains

Chinese Grammar - Verbal measure words

Verbal measure words indicate how often an action is carried out.

次 (cì) is used to say how many times something happened.

遍 (biàn) is used to emphasise that an activity was carried out for a number of times completely.

趟 (tàng) is used only with verbs of movement like

去 (qù, to go), 走 (zǒu, to walk), 来 (lái, to come), 飞 (fēi, to fly), 跑 (pǎo, to run) etc.

次: 我到北京来过三次。	wǒ dào běijīng lái guò sān cì	I have been to Beijing three times.
趟: 她飞了一趟伦敦。	tā fēi le yī tàng lúndūn	She has flown to London once.
遍: 他这本小说看了十遍。	tā zhè běn xiǎoshuō kàn le shí biàn	He has read this novel (completely) ten times.

Chinese Grammar - Complements

Complements are a very common structure in Chinese. They clarify the predicate of a sentence and follow it. Complements can express result, conclusion, potential or extent.

Extent

你说汉语说得很好。	nǐ shuō hànǔ shuō de hěn hǎo	You speak Chinese very well.
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The verb is repeated after the object 汉语, then 得 plus complement are added.
If there is no object you can simply add 得 and the complement.

你说汉语说得很好。	nǐ shuō hànǔ shuō de hěn hǎo	You speak Chinese very well.
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Complement of potential

你听得清楚吗?	nǐ tīng de qīngchǔ ma?	Can you hear clearly?
蘑菇洗不干净吗?	mógú xǐ bù gānjìng ma?	Can't you wash the mushrooms cleanly?
她走不了!	tā zǒu bù liǎo	She can't go!

得 is used to add the complement, in negative sentences 得 is replaced by 不。

Chinese Grammar - Complements

Complement of result

Either an adjective or noun that follows the main verb to indicate the result of the action.

Typical complements of result are: 错, 好, 见, 住

他听错了。	tā tīng cuò le	He misheard.
孩子做好他的作业。	háizi zuò hǎo tā de zuòyè	The child completed his homework.
我看见了我的朋友。	wǒ kànjiàn le wǒde péngyou	I saw my friend.
这很重要。我得记住。	zhè hěn zhòngyào. wǒ děi jìzhù	This is important. I must remember (it).

Complement of direction

Indicate the direction (metaphorical as well as real) of the action of the main verb.

他跑出去了。	tā pǎo chūqù le	He ran out.	他下楼去。	tā xià lóu qù	He went downstairs.
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Complement of direction

Indicate the manner in which something is done. The verb is repeated after the object 饭, then 得 plus complement are added. If there is no object you can simply add 得 and the complement.

他吃饭吃得很慢。	tā chīfàn chī de hěn màn	He eats slowly.
他说得很快。	tā shuō de hěn kuài	He speaks very fast.

Chinese Grammar - 的

的 is used to link adjective and nouns.

老师的书	lǎoshī de shū	the teacher's book
我的自行车	wǒ de zìxíngchē	my bicycle

The noun can be dropped if it is clear from the context:

这是我的。	zhè shì wǒ de	this is mine
老师的在那儿。	lǎoshī de zài nàr	the teacher's is over there.

With possessive adjective the 的 can be dropped if a close relationship exists between the two.

我的爸爸 or 我爸爸

Single syllable adjective can be used as an attribute without 的。

小孩子不上学。	xiǎo háizi bù shàng xué	Small children don't go to school.
but		
那边的孩子在做什么？	nà biān de háizi zài zuò shénme	What are the children over there doing

Chinese Grammar - 地 (de)

地 is used to combine verbs and adverbs.

她高兴地唱着。

tā gāoxìng de chàng zhe

She is singing happily.

Single syllable adverbs can be used without 地.

您慢走。

nín màn zǒu

(You) Please walk slowly.

Chinese Grammar - 得

得 has a number of different uses.

得 (děi) is a modal verb, meaning 'to have to do something'.

我的汉语不好, 我得努力学习。	wǒde hànyǔ bù hǎo, wǒ děi nǚlì xuéxí	My Chinese is not very good, I must study conscientiously.
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得 (de) is used to link a complement and the verb.

她现在紧张得很。	tā xiànzài jǐnzhāng de hěn	She is very tense at the moment.
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See Complements for more details.

得到 (dé dào) means to 'receive'.

出事以后他得到了很多帮助。	chūshì yǐhòu tā dé dào le hěn duō bāngzhù	He received a lot of help after his accident.
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Chinese Grammar - 来 (lái)

得到 (dédào) means to 'receive'.

来 to come:	他上星期来北京。	tā shàng xīngqī lái běijīng	He came to Beijing last week.
来 complement indicating movement towards the speaker:	他进来了。 *	tā jìn lái le	He came in.
来 indicating intention to do something:	我来唱歌。	wǒ lái chàng gē	Let me sing.
来 ask somebody to bring something:	来一瓶啤酒。	lái yī píng pījiǔ	Bring me a bottle of beer.

* 去 is used to indicate movement away from the speaker: 他进去了 (tā jìn qù le) He went in.

Chinese Grammar - 给

给 (gěi) can function as a preposition or a verb. It is also used in a number of very common expressions.

给 (gěi) as a preposition:

请你给我打一个电话。	qǐng nǐ gěi wǒ dǎ yī gè diànhuà	Please give me a call. (lit. Please for me make a phone call.)
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给 (gěi) as a verb:

他给了我一个礼物。	tā gěi le wǒ yī gè lǐwù	He gave me a present
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When somebody hands something (e.g. money) to another person the expression 给 or 给你 often accompanies the action.

Chinese Grammar - Time/Duration

Time is usually expressed through nominal constructions. If there are several expressions of time, the larger unit precedes the smaller. The time expression appears before the predicate.

明天我去北京。	míngtiān wǒ qù běijīng	I will go to Beijing tomorrow.
今天我很累。	jīntiān wǒ hěn lèi	I am very tired today.

To ask for the time use 什么时候 in the same place as the time expression:

你什么时候去北京? (nǐ shénme shíhòu qù běijīng). When are you going to Beijing?

Duration is expressed as an attribute or complement of the predicate

他在北京住了一年半。	tā zài běijīng zhù le yī nián bàn	He lived in Beijing for a year and a half.
他们跳舞跳了一夜。	tāmen tiàowǔ tiào le yī yē	They danced all night.

(NB: The main verb of the predicate is repeated before the expression of duration.)

To ask for the duration use 多长时间 (duōshǎo shíjiān) or 多久 (duōjiǔ) in the place of the expression of duration:

他在北京住了多长时间?	tā zài běijīng zhù le duōshǎo shíjiān	How long did he live in Beijing for?
他们跳舞跳了多久?	tāmen tiàowǔ tiào le duōjiǔ	How long did they dance for?

Chinese Grammar - Location

Location is usually expressed through nominal constructions. Common location words are:

上	下	前	后	左	右	里	外	also	中	东	南	西	北
shàng	xià	qián	hòu	zuǒ	yòu	lǐ	wài		zhōng	dōng	nán	xī	běi
above	below	in front	behind	left	right	inside	outside		middle	east	south	west	north

Location words can be used as:

attributes in front of a noun		
北大楼	běi dàlóu	the large building in the North
after a directional preposition		
他拐向北	tā guǎi xiàng běi	He turned North
following a noun		
门外	mén wài	outside the door
地上	dì shàng	on the floor

The location words can be combined with 边 (or 面, 头).

e.g. 上边 (shàngbian, above), 后边 (hòubian, behind), 外边 (wàibian, outside)

Chinese Grammar - Location

The location words can function as:

the subject		
东边是一个饭店。	dōngbian shì yī gè fàndiàn	On the left there is a hotel.
the object		
自行车在后边。	zìxíngchē zài hòubian	The bicycle is at the back.
or an attribute		
前边的邮局很大。	qiánbian de yóujú hěn dà	The post office in the front is very big.

Chinese Grammar - Passive

The passive is usually implied by context. Under the influence of Western languages overt passive constructions have become more common recently. The logical subject of the passive construction is marked by 被 (bèi). In spoken Chinese 让 (ràng), 叫 (jiào) or 给 (gěi) are used as well.

我的笔被她拿走了。	wǒde bǐ bèi tā ná zǒu le	My pen was taken away by her.
我的书让我朋友借了。	wǒde shū ràng wǒ péngyou jiè le	My book was borrowed by my friend.

If the logical subject is obvious from the context it can be dropped.

他的自行车被偷了。	tāde zìxíngchē bèi tōu le	His bicycle was stolen.
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Chinese Grammar - 把 - construction

The 把 construction is specific to Chinese. 把 is inserted before the object and the construction precedes the verb. The normal sentence order SVO then becomes S把OV.

学生把作业做完了。

xuésheng bǎ zuòyè zuò wán le

The student finished the homework.

The 把 construction can only be used with:

transitive verbs

the objective must be definite (not some abstract concept)

the verb must modify the object in some way

the verb must be followed by some other element (e.g. a complement, 了)

Chinese Grammar - 是.....的 construction

The 是.....的 construction is used to emphasise a particular part of the sentence. 是 precedes the emphasised phrase, 的 at the end of the sentence.

他是去年毕业的。	Tā shì qù nián bìyè de	He graduated LAST YEAR.
他们是坐飞机去上海的。	tāmen shì zuò fēiji qù shànghǎi de	They flew to Shanghai BY PLANE.

If the object of the sentence is to be emphasised, 的 follows the verb.

我学的是中文。	wǒ xuéde shì zhōngwén	I am studying CHINESE.
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End of Basic Chinese Grammar - Index