

Tones in Chinese

There are four tones in Chinese plus a fifth neutral tone. Changing the tone changes the meaning of the word.

- The first tone is flat just like walking on a flat smooth road.
- / The second tone rises like going up hill.
- ✓ The third tone falls and rises like riding on a roller coaster.
- \ The fourth tone goes down fast all the way.

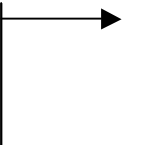
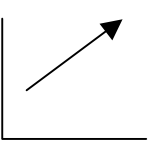
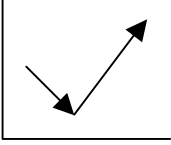
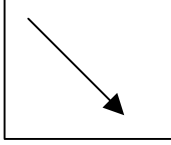

The fifth neutral tone short and lightly spoken, and can be seen in the use of the word “ma” at the end of a sentence to make it a question.

For example:

Nǐ haǒ = “Hello” (literally “you good”)

Nǐ haǒ **ma**? = “How are you?” (literally “you good?”)

The tone marks are added to pinyin to indicate the correct tones of words.

mā	má	mǎ	mà	ma
媽	麻	馬	罵	嗎
mother	numb	horse	scold	question word
				
First tone (flat)	second tone (going up)	third tone (down and up)	fourth tone (going down)	neutral tone (light)