

4 Rhymes

A table showing all possible rhymes follows below. It is too long and complicated to be quickly internalized like the chart of initials, but you can practice reading the rows aloud with the help of a teacher or native speaker. You can also map your progress through the rhymes by circling syllables, or adding meaningful examples, as you learn new vocabulary. The table is organized by main vowel (a, e, i, o, u, ü), and then within each vowel, by medial (i, u and ü) and final (i, o/u, n, ng). The penultimate column, marked ‘w/o C_i’ (ie ‘without initial consonant’), lists syllables that lack an initial consonant (with the rarer ones placed in parentheses) and so begin with a (written) vowel or medial (the latter always represented with an initial y or w). The final column gives pronunciation hints. Asterisks (*), following certain numbered rows, mark sets that need special attention. Final-r, whose special properties were mentioned above, is treated separately.

<i>Rhymes with (a):</i>		<i>egs</i>						<i>w/o C_i</i>
1	a	ta	cha	da	ma	ba	la	a
2	a-i	tai	chai	dai	mai	chai	zai	ai
3	a-o	tao	chao	dao	pao	zao	rao	ao
4	a-n	tan	ran	zhan	can	lan	pan	an
5	a-ng	dang	sang	zhang	mang	lang	zang	ang
6	i-a	jia	qia	xia				ya
7	i-a-o	jiao	qiao	xiao				yao
8*	i-a-n	jian	qian	xian				yan [yen]
9	i-a-ng	jiang	qiang	xiang				yang
10	u-a	hua	gua	zhua	shua			wa
11	u-a-i	chuai						(wai)
12	u-a-n	huan	guan	zhuan	shuan	cuan		wan
13	u-a-ng	huang	guang	zhuang	shuang			wang [wahng]

<i>Rhymes with (e)</i>								
14	e	zhe	che	she	re	le		e [uh]
15	e-i	zhei	shei	lei	fei	bei		(ei) [ay]
16	e-n	zhen	shen	fen	cen	men		en [uhn]
17	e-ng	leng	sheng	ceng	deng	zheng		(eng) [uhng]
19	i-e	jie	xie	lie	mie			ye [yeh]
20*	u-e	jue	que	xue	nüe	lüe		yue [yüeh]

<i>Rhymes with (i)</i>		<i>the ‘ee’ rhymes</i>						
21a	i	li	bi	ti				yi [yee]
21b		ji	qi	xi				yi [yee]
22	i-n	jin	qin	xin	lin	bin		yin [yeen]
23	i-ng	jing	qing	xing	ling	bing		ying [yeeng]
24*	u-i	dui	gui	shui	rui	chui	[-way]	wei [way]

		<i>the ‘buzzing’ i-rhymes</i>						
25*	i	zi	ci	si				[dzz, tsz...]
26	i	zhi	chi	shi	ri			[jr, chr...]

Rhymes with (o)

27*	o	bo	po	mo	fo		[-waw]		
28	u-o	duo	tuo	guo	shuo	zuo	[-waw]	wo	[waw]
29*	o-u	zhou	zou	dou	hou	chou	[-oh]	ou	[oh]
30	o-ng	zhong	dong	long	zong				
31	i-o-ng	jiong	qiong	xiong				yong	

Rhymes with (u)**the ‘oo’ rhymes**

32	u	shu	lu	zhu	zu	cu	[-oo]	wu	[woo]
33*	u-n	shun	lun	zhun	kun	cun	[-wuhn]	wen	[wuhn]
34*	i-u	jiu	qiu	xiu	liu	diu	[-yoo ~ -yeo]	you	[yeo]

Rhymes with (ü)**the ‘ü’ rhymes**

35*	u	ju	qu	xu	lǜ	nǜ	[-yü]	yu	[yü]
36	u-n	jun	qun	xun			[-yün]	yun	[yün]

4.1 Notes on the rhymesThe relationship between the i- and u-rhymes and C_i

Recall that in the C_i chart presented earlier, the row-4 C_i (zh, ch, sh, r) are distinguished from the row-5 (j, q, x) by position of the tongue. In English terms, the distinction is a ‘j’, ‘ch’ or ‘sh’ with the tongue in the position of ‘dr’, ‘tr’ or ‘shr’ (respectively), versus a ‘j’, ‘ch’ or ‘sh’ with the tongue in the position of the ‘y’ of ‘yield’ (ji, qi, xi). But this difference, even if it is appreciated, seems, nonetheless, very slight. And, indeed, it would be much more difficult to perceive it if the vowels that followed were identically pronounced. But they never are!

Note that row-5 C_i initials (j, q, x) are ONLY followed by the sounds (not the written letters, the sounds!) ‘ee’ and ‘ü’, written i and u, respectively. Here are some examples:

ji, jie, jian, qi, qie, qian, xi, xie, xian; ju, jue, jun, qu, que, qun, xu, xue, xun.

Row-4 C_i, on the other hand (and the same goes for row-3) are NEVER followed by the sounds ‘ee’ and ‘ü’:

zhi, zi, zhu, zu, zhan, zan, chi, ci, chu, cu, chan, chen etc.

Because the creators of pinyin let i and u each represent two different sounds, this complementary distribution is obscured: the vowels of ji and zhi look alike, but they do not sound alike; the same for ju and zhu. So if you hear ‘chee’ it must be written qi, for ‘ee’ never follows ch; if you hear ‘chang’, it must be written chang, for q can only be followed by the sound ‘ee’. And so on.

Exercise 4.

The following syllables all contain the written vowels i and u. Practice reading them clearly, on a single tone. As with all the exercises in this lesson, repeat daily until confident.

chi qi xie qu chu chun jia qin cu qu shun
qun shu ju ci xu zi zhu shi xi xia qu

4.2 The value of the letter ‘e’

The value of e also violates the expectations of English speakers. It is ‘uh’ in all contexts (ze, deng, chen) except where it follows written i or u, when it is pronounced ‘eh’ (xie, nie, xue), or when it precedes a written i, where it is pronounced ‘ey’ (lei, bei, zei).

Exercise 5.

a) Practice reading the following syllables containing e:

chen wei zhen xie ben ren lei re bei jie e leng zeì che bie

b) Now try pronouncing the following proper names:

[uh] Zhōu Ēnlái (premier)	[uh] Máo Zédōng (chairman)	[eh] Jiǎng Jièshí (Chiang Kai-shek)	[ey] Běijīng
Lǐ Dēnghuī (former Tw pres.)	Éméi shān (Omei Mtn.)	Lièníng (Lenin)	Sòng Měilíng (wife of Chiang)

4.3 The ‘o’ rhymes: ou versus uo / o

On early encounters, it is easy to confuse pinyin rhymes that are spelled similarly, such as -ou and -uo. This can lead to some pronunciation problems that are very difficult to correct later, so you need to make sure you master them early. The rhyme ou, with the ‘O’ leading, is pronounced like the name of the letter ‘O’ (in English) – rhyming with ‘know’. The rhyme, uo, on the other hand, with the ‘O’ trailing, is pronounced like ‘war’ without the final ‘r’. However, as you now know, after the row-1 C_i, uo is spelled o: bo, po, mo, fo rhyme with duo, tuo, nuo and luo.

Exercise 6.

a) Here are some more names (mostly), all containing ‘o’:

Bōlán (Poland)	Sūzhōu (city near Shanghai)	Mòxīgē (Mexico)
luòtuo (camel)	Zhāng Yimóu (film director)	Zhōu Ēnlái (premier)
luóbo (radish)	Guō Mòruò (20 th C writer)	Lǐ Bó (aka Lǐ Bái) (Tang poet)

b) And more single syllables, which you can read on a tone of your choosing:

mou tuo bo fo zhou duo po dou zuo fou luo rou

4.4 The ü-rhymes

The first note in §4.1 (under the list of rhymes) makes the point that many of the ü-rhymes are revealed by the class of consonantal initial. Written u after row-5 initials (j, q, x) is always pronounced ü; after any other initial, it is ‘oo’; thus (with any particular tone): zhu - ju, chu - qu, shu - xu, but pu, fu, du, ku, hu, etc. However, the sound ‘ü’ does occur after two initials other than the j, q and x of row-5. It occurs after n and l, as well. In these cases, ü may contrast with u, and the difference has to be shown on the vowel, not on the initial: lù ‘road’ versus lǜ ‘green’; nǚ ‘a crossbow’ versus nǚ ‘female’. In addition to being a core vowel, the sound ‘ü’ also occurs as a medial. Again, when it follows row-5 initials, it is written as u: jue, que, xue; but following l or n it is written with ü: lüèzi ‘abbreviation’; nüèji ‘malaria’. In the latter cases, it is redundant, since there is no contrast üe versus ue.