

Shortcuts for Pinyin Romanization

Detailed guides to the pronunciation of Pinyin is provided in many books and on numerous websites. Here are some of the more unusual Pinyin letters that English speakers need to pay special attention to.

Consonants

c - English 'ts' (as in 'its')

q - English 'ch' (as in 'cheer') eg. 'Qigong', 'Taijiquan'

x - English 'sh' (as in 'ship') eg. 'Xingyiquan', 'Maxiqi'

z - English 'ds' (as in 'pads')

zh - English 'j' (as in 'job')

Vowels

i after h - English 'r' (as in 'grr')

i after s, c, z - English 'z' (as in 'bzzzz')

i elsewhere - English 'ee' (as in 'beet')

ian or yan - English 'yen' (as in ¥)

ui - English 'way' (as in 'lost his way')

u after q, j, x, or y - French 'u' or German 'ü'

ü or yu - French 'u' or German ü (place your lips to say 'oo' and try to say 'ee')

u elsewhere - English 'oo' (as in 'pooh')

Tones in Pinyin

Tones are pitch patterns which characterize pronunciation. Pinyin uses four tones (flat, rising, scooping up and dropping) which are often represented in romanized text by diacritical marks above vowels. Though tone indicators are not generally used in most print material, they are necessary both for learning correct pronunciation and to distinguish similar sounding words, they are not generally used.