Pronunciation Matters

Pronouncing names correctly is particularly important. A name is part of a person's identity. When we take the time to learn proper pronunciation of a name, we can produce a significant impact on that person's sense of belonging. Below, we have provided a short summary and links (updated Jan 2022) to help with pronunciation of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean.

A free and helpful tool that can be used in the classroom or even on your own email signature is **NameBadge**, which is part of NameCoach Inc. This allows users to create a page where they can type out their name, recording the proper pronunciation, and more.

CHINESE Pronunciation

Adapted from Chinese Pronunciation Guide for Beginners (meetmandarin.com)

A note on Pronunciation of Chinese Words

The pinyin romanization system is the official system of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the system adopted by most US newspapers and magazines. It is one of the easiest romanizations to learn with fewer letters per sound than any other system. Most of the pronunciations are easily identifiable for non-Chinese speakers, with the following exceptions:
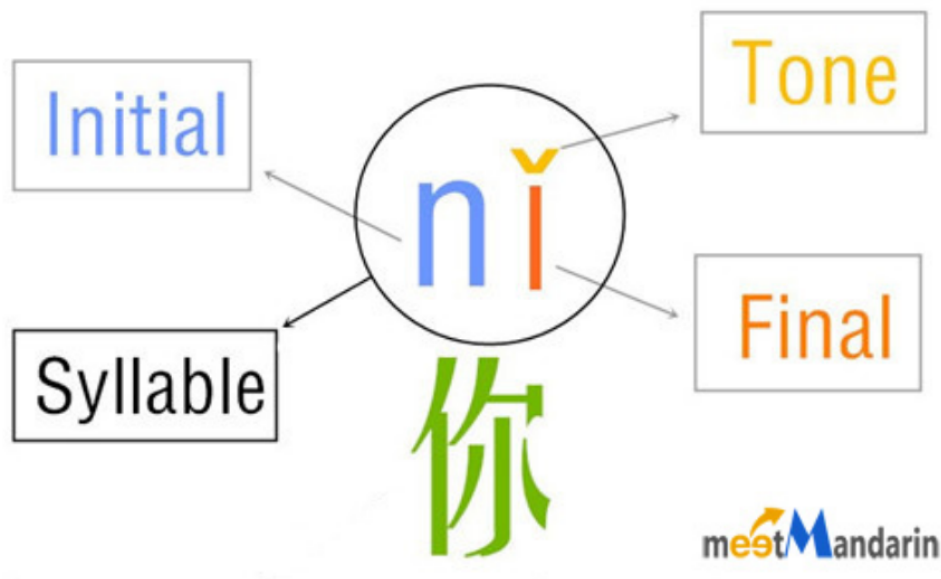
C is pronounced like **ts**, as in "bats"
Ch is like **j,** as in "jump"
Q is like **ch**, as in "chew"
X is like **sh** as in "shoe"

What is Pinyin Like?

In Chinese, a syllable (pinyin) is composed of a consonant, a vowel and a tone. A Chinese syllable usually begins with a consonant which is called Initial, and is followed by vowel(s) which are called Final(s).

Pinyin for Chinese Character "你" (you).

JAPANESE Pronounciation

Adapted from [A Guide to Japanese Pronunciation: Sounds, Words, and Sentences (tofugu.com)](tofugu.com) and [Learn Hiragana: The Ultimate Guide (tofugu.com)](tofugu.com)

The Japanese language uses 3 writing systems: hiragana and katakana (both phonetic syllabaries) and kanji (Chinese characters).

Japanese has just 5 vowel sounds:
a (ah) as is "car"
i (ee) as is "eel"
u (ooh) as is "you"
e (eh) as is "egg"
o (oh) as in "oh my!"

The following sounds don't have an exact English equivalent:
f: Traditionally, the letter f only appears in Japanese as fu. This is a soft sound, somewhere between an f and h, and sounds similar to the pronunciation "who."

r: The sound of the letter r in Japanese (seen as ra-ri-ru-re-ro) falls somewhere between the English pronunciation of r and l. The tongue touches the top of the mouth, but only briefly.

KOREAN Pronunciation

Adapted from [How to Correctly Say Hangul Letters & Words (90daykorean.com)](#) and [Korean Pronunciation (howtostudykorean.com)](#)

The Korean language is written in **Hangul**. Hangul was created by King Sejong of the Joseon Dynasty and proclaimed Korea's first alphabet in 1446. It is one of the youngest alphabets and known as one of the easiest to learn to read and write.

Hangul consists of **10 vowels** and **14 consonants**. You will also see vowel combinations along with double consonants.

Let's look at some common words you already know.

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is pronounced "soul" by the majority of English speakers. However, the pronunciation of the two syllables together sounds a tad different in Korean.

서울 = [서] seo + [울] ul = seo-ul

The "seo" sounds like the first syllable of "subtle" and "ul" sounds like "ool" of "tool."

Samsung, the multinational electronics corporation, is often pronounced "Sam" similar to the name Sam and "sung" as in the past tense of sing. The latter half sounds the same in Korean.

삼성 = [삼] sam + [성] sung = sam-sung

"Sam" along with all "a" sounds in Korean sounds more like "ah" similar to "palm" or even "pot."

Hangul Chart

1-1. Consonants

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ
g	n	d	r	m	b	s

ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ
ng	j	ch	k	t	p	h

1-2. Vowels

ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ
a	ya	eo	yeo	o

ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ
yo	u	yu	eu	i

1-3. Vowel Combinations

ㅐ	ㅒ	ㅔ	ㅖ	ㅘ	ㅙ
ae	yae	e	ye	wa	wae

ㅚ	ㅝ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅢ
oe	weo	we	wi	ui

KoreanClass101.com

Hangeul Chart of consonants with vowels

	ㄱ g (k)	ㄴ n	ㄷ d (t)	ㄹ r, l	ㅁ m	ㅂ b (p)	ㅅ s	ㅇ	ㅈ j	ㅊ ch	ㅋ k	ㅌ t	ㅍ p	ㅎ h
ㅏ a	가	나	다	라	마	바	사	아	자	차	카	타	파	하
ㅑ ya	갸	냐	댜	랴	먀	뱌	샤	야	쟈	챠	캬	탸	퍄	햐
ㅘ wa	과	놔	돠	롸	뫄	봐	솨	와	좌	촤	콰	톼	퐈	화
ㅓ eo	거	너	더	러	머	버	서	어	저	처	커	터	퍼	허
ㅕ yeo	겨	녀	뎌	려	며	벼	셔	여	져	쳐	켜	텨	펴	혀
ㅗ o	고	노	도	로	모	보	소	오	조	초	코	토	포	호
ㅛ yo	교	뇨	됴	료	묘	뵤	쇼	요	죠	쵸	쿄	툐	표	효
ㅝ wo	궈	눠	둬	뤄	뭐	붜	숴	워	줘	춰	쿼	퉈	풔	훠
ㅜ u	구	누	두	루	무	부	수	우	주	추	쿠	투	푸	후
ㅠ yu	규	뉴	듀	류	뮤	뷰	슈	유	쥬	츄	큐	튜	퓨	휴
ㅢ ui	긔	늬	듸	릐	믜	븨	싀	의	즤	츼	킈	틔	픠	희
ㅐ ae	개	내	대	래	매	배	새	애	재	채	캐	태	패	해
ㅒ yae	걔	냬	댸	럐	먜	뱨	섀	얘	쟤	챼	컈	턔	퍠	햬
ㅙ wae	괘	놰	돼	뢔	뫠	봬	쇄	왜	좨	쵀	쾌	퇘	퐤	홰
ㅔ e	게	네	데	레	메	베	세	에	제	체	케	테	페	헤
ㅖ ye	계	녜	뎨	례	몌	볘	셰	예	졔	쳬	켸	톄	폐	혜
ㅞ we	궤	눼	뒈	뤠	뭬	붸	쉐	웨	줴	췌	퀘	퉤	풰	훼
ㅡ eu	그	느	드	르	므	브	스	으	즈	츠	크	트	프	흐
ㅚ oe	괴	뇌	되	뢰	뫼	뵈	쇠	외	죄	최	쾨	퇴	푀	회
ㅣ i	기	니	디	리	미	비	시	이	지	치	키	티	피	히
ㅟ wi	귀	뉘	뒤	뤼	뮈	뷔	쉬	위	쥐	취	퀴	튀	퓌	휘

In many consonant romanizations you will see 2 possible letter sounds. Sometimes, these consonants have a slightly different pronunciation depending on where they are placed in the spelling of the syllable. Other times, these consonants sound like a combination of the 2 letter sounds. This recognition comes with practice!

To download this section CLICK HERE.