

# How to Type Chinese Using Pinyin?

*by Chinese2020.com*

**SUMMARY** This article describes how to type Chinese characters using pinyin and how to avoid some common mistakes.

**【Why Typing?】** Things are changing!. Today with widespread of social media and electronic devices, people do more and more typing than handwriting no matter what language you use. Schools ask students to hand in their homework typed.

Learning how to type Chinese is important. It is not only a good way to communicate with others but also help you to improve your Chinese knowledge.

**【Why Pinyin?】** It is not easy to type Chinese characters or hanzi (汉字). Chinese is not an alphabetical language. Instead it is a picture in a square formed by many strokes. In alphabetical system, you can remake the keyboard to allow all letters coded in, then you just hit each key one by one. When a word is done, hit the space key to end it. You cannot do this for Chinese since (1) there are many strokes; and most importantly (2) there is NO strict order of strokes as to which stroke should come next. It is like an artist that uses oil pen to stroke the canvas here and there randomly.

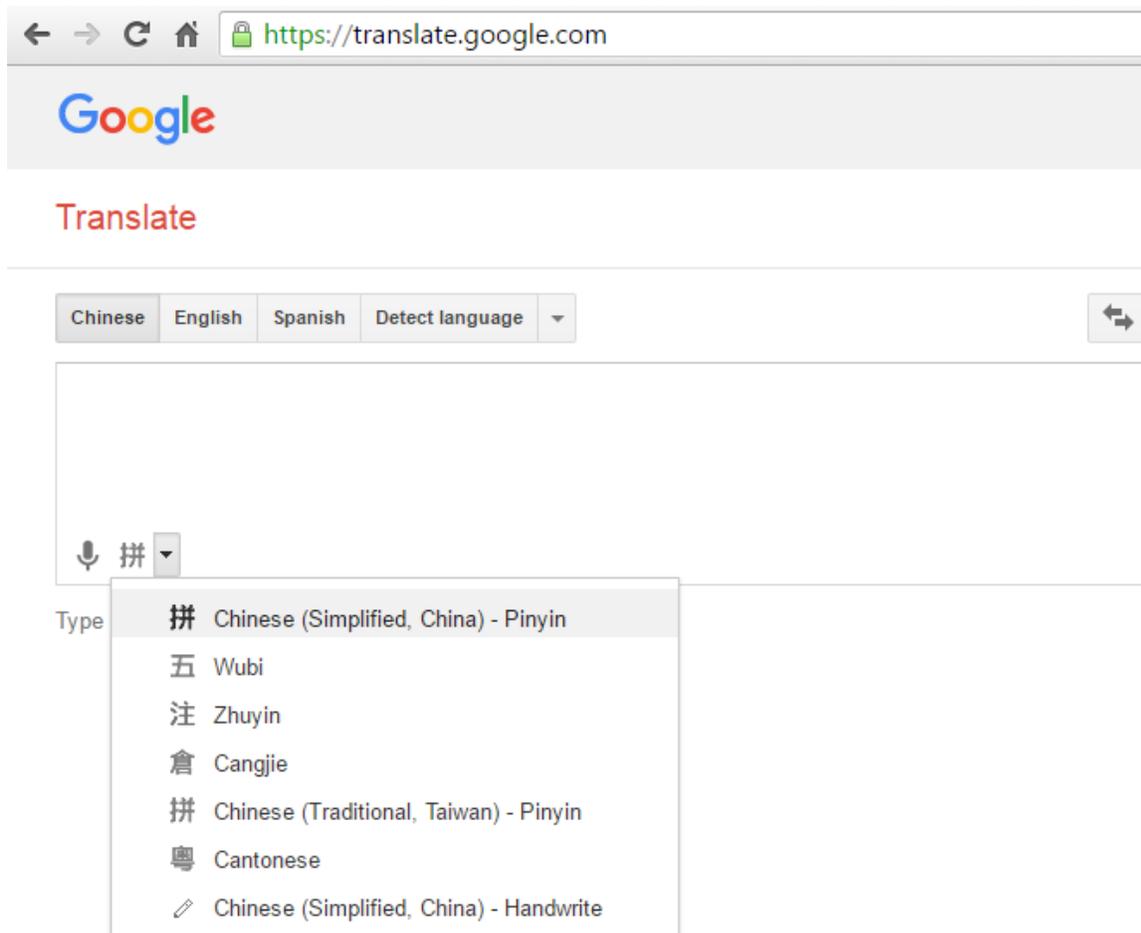
Since 1980's, many methods of typing hanzi have been developed. Each has its benefits and shortcomings depending on user's skill and purpose. For example, for professionals who need to type very fast, they can use 五笔字型. But it needs a lot of training and memorizing. Luckily, for people who know how hanzi sounds, they can type hanzi by pinyin.

Pinyin is a pronunciation system which uses 26 English letters and 4 tones to represent sound of a character. As long as you know pinyin, you don't need any training and you can still type hanzi. With several basic guidelines in mind, you can even type hanzi very fast.

**【Need Software?】** Technically, you do need software to type hanzi. You can select "Chinese" or "East Asian Language" in "native language" from your computer settings. Or you can search web and download Chinese pinyin input software package from Microsoft or Google. Most of them should be free.

If you don't want to install software, Google's translate can help you do the same thing.

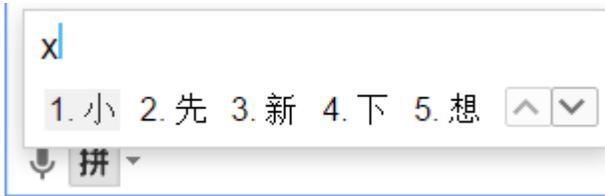
In <https://translate.google.com/> you first select "Chinese" from "Detect language". Then from input method icon  which is close to the speaker, select the first one "Chinese (Simplified, China) - Pinyin". See image below. Now you can type hanzi! Next we will use this method to type.



**【Prerequisites】** You have to know hanzi and its pinyin. That's all you need to know. Of course, if you know more words, that would be more helpful since typing a word are more effective than typing a character.

**【Typing Strategies】** Yes! There are several strategies which will help you a lot. This is the main part of this article. Applying these strategies will definitely help you to type fast. There are two situations: (1) type one character, and (2) type word.

**1. One Character:** for single character, type initial first, then watch the list. Your character may already be in the first list. Example, to type 小 (xiao: small), after you type initial **x**, it is listed as the first one in the list since it has the highest frequency of usage in all characters whose pinyin start with **x**. Then you just need to hit the number before the character. If number is 1 which is first one, you can hit space key as a default.



In other cases, the first list may not have that hanzi. There are two ways to go.

(a) You can either click on the next arrow   and keep searching. For example, to type 美 (mei) if you just type *m*, you won't see it. After clicking "down" arrow twice, it shows up.



(b) You can type whole pinyin and it will most likely show up. See below.



Single character typing is a bit slow since many characters has same or similar sound. If the character has high frequency, it will show up early. If not, you may have to click "down" arrow many times to find it. For example, 一 (yi: one) is the simplest character, but there more than a hundred characters which all have the same pinyin.

**Remark.** For special vowel like *ü*, type *v* instead. Check difference below. First one is *nu* and 2nd one is *nv* (actual pinyin is *nü*).



Also note after initial *j*, *ü* is written as *u* but its sound still *ü*. In typing, you need to type *u* instead of *v*.



**2. Word: Type initials!** A word is a vocabulary with two or more characters which is used as a basic building block along with characters to form sentences. It is even more effective to type just initials of each character. The reason is simple, the more characters of a word has, the fewer words share same pinyin.

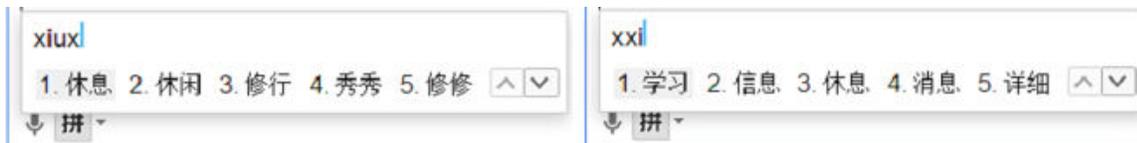
For example, to type 我们 (wo men: we/us/ours) after typing *wm*, it immediately shows up in the first place since it has highest frequency.



For others, it may not be so lucky due to its lower frequency. For example, you want 休息 (xiu xi: rest). After typing *xx*, it does not show up.

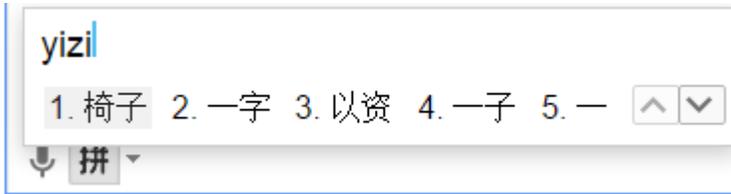


Similar to situation of typing single character, you can (a) either click "down" arrow; or (b) you can type whole pinyin of one or more characters. For (a), it shows up in the next list. For (b), there are several options, you can type *xiuxi* or *xxi* or *xiuxi*. The word show in the first list in all cases. See two first two results below.



**Byproduct.** Due to effectiveness of typing words, you can take advantage of it when you type single characters. Think of a word which contains (better one is to start with) the character. Then type the word and remove the redundant character.

This applies to those characters whose pinyins have too many duplicated characters. For example, to type 椅 (chair) by *yi*, you have to click "down" arrow more than 5 times depends on input software you use since this is a relatively low frequency character. But if you type 椅子 (*yizi*: chair), it shows up immediately. After you get it, just remove 子.



### Remarks.

(a) Type initials of a word is especially effective for Chinese idioms which are mostly 4 characters. For example, 人山人海 (ren shan ren hai), just type *rsrh* and space key.



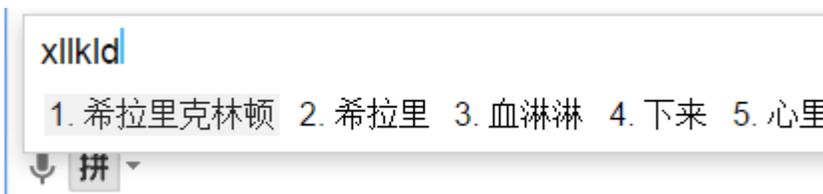
(b) This is also true for phrase more than 2 characters. For example, 加拿大 (jia na da: Canada). Type *jnd* and space key. Isn't that cute?



Another example is to type foreign's name in Chinese. Type *lcd* for 理查德 (li cha de: Richard). Yes. it is the 2nd one in the list.



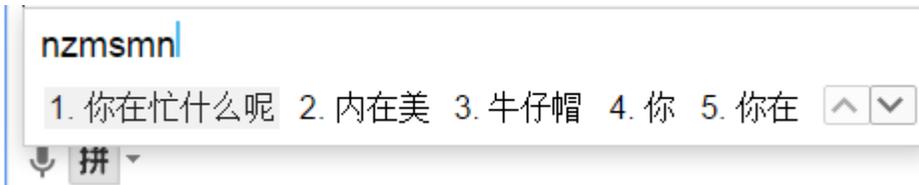
Will *Hilary Clinton* be the next President of USA? I don't know now. But I can type her name 希拉里克林顿 here and see the result in late 2016. Wow, just typing initials *xllkld* will result in a full name of next President of USA!



(c) Actually, you can do even more. Try initials for simple sentences. It is hard to tell which sentence is simple and common. But it does not hurt to try it. For example, I want to type 你怎么了(ni zen me le: What's up?). After typing *nzml*, I got 你怎么啦. Not bad.



Let's have more fun. When I try *nzmsmn* for 你在忙什么呢 (ni zai mang shen me ne: What are you working?) Amazingly, I got them. So why not try?



(d) When a character from a word has pinyin starts from a vowel, you need to add apostrophe to separate it from pinyin in front of it. For example, pinyin *jinan* can be from either *ji nan* (济南) or *jin an* (金安).



To distinguish, use apostrophe: *ji'nan* for 济南 and *jin'an* for 金安. See one example below. Typing *jin'an* rules out 济南.



**【What Pitfalls?】** There are some common mistakes people often make. You may have more depending on what language you are speaking.

**1. Type *ch* for *q*, and *sh* for *x*.** When pinyin system was created, it borrowed English letters to denote certain sound. There are 3 different situations.

(a) Most of them are similar, such as consonants b, p, m, f...

(b) Some are different such as *q* is like *ch* as in *cheap*, *x* is like *sh* as in *ship*, and *z* is like *ds* as in *kids*. The first two are the most often mistakes.

(c) Some is not used. Letter v is not used as a consonant. Instead it is used as a vowel to represent special sound *ü* as a sound in German word *über* or *u* in French *lune*.

Most of the mistakes come from (b). To avoid it, put a short note in front of your screen. When you cannot find your character, take a look at it and see if its initial is **q** or **x**.

**2. Retroflex initials *ch, sh and zh*** are very hard to learn. They are special in Chinese. In fact, only people in northern parts of China (especially Beijing surrounding area) speak them in the old times. Later they were introduced into pinyin system and became official in Mandarin.

You need to learn how to distinguish them from non-retroflex initials **c, s** and **z**. If you type **c, s** and **z** and cannot find the character, just try its retroflex initial and see if any luck.

**CONCLUSION** Typing hanzi will be the trend. Type hanzi by pinyin is the easiest way to do. It does not need extra training. It can also help better understand hanzi. To type hanzi effectively, you always try to type initials first and observe whether hanzi appear in the list. Use "down" arrow to search more lists. Or you can type more pinyin to refine the first list. Practise makes perfect! The more you type, the more experience you have to type fast. Good luck!