



Lesson 1 Nǐ hǎo *Hello*

Communication goals

- Learn culturally appropriate greetings in formal situations
- Give basic information about yourself

Key structures

NP **shì** NP

yes-no questions with **ma**

negation with **bù**

yě + VP

hěn + AdjV

Dialogue

The Situation: The “new student reception” in a study-abroad program in China attended by teachers and new students. The students have come from countries around the world to continue their Chinese language study and to learn more about Chinese culture. The setting is relatively formal, and most of the students are meeting each other for the first time.



Part A

Xiǎo Zhāng: Nǐ hǎo.

Xiǎo Gāo: Nǐ hǎo.

Xiǎo Zhāng: Wǒ shì xuésheng. Nǐ shì xuésheng ma?

Xiǎo Gāo: Shì. Wǒ yě shì xuésheng.

Part B

Xiǎo Zhāng: Tā shì xuésheng ma?

Xiǎo Gāo: Bù shì. Tā bù shì xuésheng. Tā shì lǎoshī. Tā shì Lǐ lǎoshī.

Part C

Xiǎo Gāo: Lǎoshī hǎo.

Lǐ lǎoshī: Xiǎo Gāo, nǐ hǎo ma?

Xiǎo Gāo: Wǒ hěn hǎo, xièxie.

Lǐ lǎoshī: Zài jiàn.

Vocabulary

bù	negation	<i>no, not</i>
Gāo	family name	<i>(family name)</i>
hǎo	adjectival verb	<i>good</i>
hěn	intensifier	<i>very</i>
lǎoshī	noun	<i>teacher, professor</i>
Lǐ	family name	<i>(family name)</i>
ma	final particle	<i>(forms yes-no questions)</i>
nǐ	pronoun	<i>you</i>
nǐ hǎo	greeting	<i>hello (formal greeting)</i>
shì	stative verb	<i>be</i>
tā	pronoun	<i>he/him, she/her, it</i>
wǒ	pronoun	<i>I/me</i>
xiǎo	family name prefix	*
xièxie	conversational expression	<i>thank you</i>
xuésheng	noun	<i>student</i>
yě	adverb	<i>also</i>
zài jiàn	conversational expression	<i>goodbye</i>
Zhāng	family name	<i>(family name)</i>

Dialogue practice

Do these activities in class after mastering each part of Dialogue 1.

Dialogue 1A: Pretend you are at the new student reception. Greet a classmate and find out if he is a student. Tell him that you are also a student.

Dialogue 1B: Choose an identity, either **xuésheng** or **lǎoshī**. Greet a classmate and find out if she is a student or a teacher. Your classmate should find out if you are a student or a teacher. Repeat until you have identified at least three classmates.

Dialogue 1C: Pair up with a classmate and take turns asking how you are. When you are done, say goodbye. Repeat the conversation with at least three more classmates.

Use and structure

1.1. Family names and addressing friends

In this lesson we are introduced to two students, Mary Girard and David James, who are “studying abroad” in China. In this book we call them **Xiǎo Gāo** and **Xiǎo Zhāng**. **Gāo** and **Zhāng** are Chinese family names (surnames) that are similar in sound to their western family names. **Xiǎo + family name** is a form of address that is often used between friends who are about the same age, and it is also a way for an older person to address a younger friend. It is the way that these two students will address each other when they become friends. In Chinese, people do not address each other with the family name alone, and **Xiǎo Gāo** and **Xiǎo Zhāng** will never call each other **Gāo** and **Zhāng**. We will learn more about names in Lesson 3.

1.2. The Greeting **nǐ hǎo**

Nǐ hǎo is a greeting. We translate **nǐ hǎo** with the English expression *hello*, but it is more formal and more restricted in use than the greeting *hello* is in English. It can be used when meeting people for the first time in formal situations, and it is often used in business contexts, especially when answering the telephone. Students typically greet their teacher by saying **lǎoshī hǎo** *hello teacher (hello professor)* and teachers can greet a class of students by saying **xuésheng hǎo** *hello students*.

1.3. Pronouns

Mandarin pronouns have a single form that does not change whether the pronoun is used as subject or object. **Wǒ** means *I* or *me*. **Nǐ** means *you* (subject) or *you* (object). **Tā** means *he* or *him*, *she* or *her*, or *it*.

	subject	object
<i>first person</i>	wǒ I	wǒ me
<i>second person</i>	nǐ you	nǐ you
<i>third person</i>	tā he/she/it	tā him/her/it

1.4. Shì be

Shì is the verb *be* in Mandarin. It links a subject with a noun or noun phrase.

S	V	N/NP
Wǒ	shì	xuésheng.
<i>I am (a) student.</i>		

Mandarin verbs have only one, unchanging form. Verbs do not change to mark tense or to agree with the subject. Thus, the same verb **shì** is used to indicate (I) *am*, (you) *are*, (he, she, it) *is*, *were*, and *was*.

Wǒ shì xuésheng.	<i>I am a student.</i>
Nǐ shì xuésheng ma?	<i>Are you a student?</i>
Tā shì lǎoshī.	<i>He/she is a teacher.</i>

1.5. Word order and phrase order in the Mandarin sentence

The normal order of information in the Mandarin sentence is:

S	V	O
Tā	shì	xuésheng.
he/she	be	student
<i>He/she is a student.</i>		

1.6. Asking yes-no questions with **ma**

Nǐ shì xuésheng ma?
<i>Are you a student?</i>

Yes-no questions are questions that can be answered *yes* or *no*. Mandarin has a number of ways to form yes-no questions. The simplest way is to add the final particle **ma** to the end of a statement. You can think of **ma** as adding the meaning “*yes or no?*” to the sentence. The word order in statements and in yes-no questions with **ma** is the same:

S	V	O	(ma)
Tā	shì	xuésheng.	
he/she	be	student	
<i>He/she is a student.</i>			
Tā	shì	xuésheng	ma?
he/she	be	student	yes or no
<i>Is he/she a student?</i>			

1.7. Answering *yes*

There is no word for *yes* in Mandarin. When answering *yes* to a yes-no question, repeat the verb that is used in the question. The verb is underlined in the following example.

Q: Nǐ shì xuésheng ma?

A: Wǒ shì xuésheng.

To give the short answer *yes*, just repeat the verb:

Q: Nǐ shì xuésheng ma?

A: Shì.

1.8. Yě *also*

Yě *also* is an adverb. It always occurs before a verb or verb phrase, and never before a noun or at the end of a sentence. Yě occurs before negation. For more on negation, see Use and Structure note 1.9.

(S) yě + V(P)

Wǒ yě shì xuésheng.

I am also a student.

1.9. Answering *no* and saying *no*

Mandarin has two words for *no*. In this lesson we learn one of them: **bù**. **Bù** negates most verbs. It occurs right before the verb or verb phrase.

Tā bù shì xuésheng. *She is not a student.*

If the sentence contains yě *also*, yě occurs before **bù**:

Tā yě bù shì xuésheng. *She is also not a student.*

To give a short answer *no*, just say **bù** + the verb:

Q: Tā shì xuésheng ma? *Is she a student?*

A: Bù shì. *No.*

We will learn the other commonly used word for *no* in Lesson 4.

1.10. Names and titles: Lǐ lǎoshī

Lǐ lǎoshī means *Teacher Li*, or, in common American usage, *Professor Li*. Lǐ, like Gāo and Zhāng, is a family name. Lǎoshī *teacher* is a title. In Mandarin, a title always follows the family name.

1.11. Greeting vs. question: Nǐ hǎo and nǐ hǎo ma?

Nǐ hǎo *hello* is a greeting (Use and Structure note 1.2). You can respond to the greeting nǐ hǎo by saying nǐ hǎo. In contrast, nǐ hǎo ma? is a yes-no question, and it requires an answer. If you are all right, you respond to this question by saying wǒ hěn hǎo *I'm fine (I'm okay)*.

1.12. Adjectival verbs: Hǎo good

Hǎo *good* is translated into English as an adjective, but in Mandarin it can function as the main verb in the sentence. Therefore, we call hǎo an adjectival verb. All but a few English adjectives function as adjectival verbs in Mandarin. Notice that adjectival verbs do not occur with the verb shì *be*.

Say this: Do not say this:
Wǒ hěn hǎo. ⊗ Wǒ shì hěn hǎo.
I am fine.

1.13. Intensifier + adjectival verb: Hěn hǎo very good

Hěn *very* indicates the intensity of an adjectival verb. Therefore, we call it an intensifier. Words like *too, somewhat, extremely*, etc. are also intensifiers, and we will learn their Mandarin equivalents in later lessons.

Mandarin intensifiers occur right before the adjectival verb: hěn hǎo *very good*.

Mandarin intensifiers are always negated with bù.

In Mandarin, adjectival verbs are typically preceded by either an intensifier or negation. When intensity is not emphasized, the intensifier hěn is used. In other words, hěn sometimes is used to contribute the meaning *very*, and sometimes it is used in a sentence in order to satisfy the requirement that the adjectival verb has to be preceded by something. You can always translate hěn as *very*.

Sentence pyramids

The sentence pyramids illustrate the use of each new vocabulary item and structure introduced in the lesson. Use them to help you learn how to form phrases and sentences in Mandarin. Supply the English translation for the last line where indicated.

I. hǎo Nǐ hǎo.	<i>good, well</i> <i>Hello.</i>
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