Welcome to the Travel China Cheaper guide to learning Chinese!

You've started on a journey to learning one of the most important global languages...kudos to you! Whether you've been studying for years or this is the first step you're taking toward learning Mandarin Chinese, I want to personally welcome you to this expat guide to learning Chinese.

A quick note: this is **NOT a Chinese language course**. I'm not here to teach you Chinese - there are plenty of companies that are already doing this very well.

This Expat Guide to Learning Chinese is a short introduction to the various tools and services that are available to help you learn the language faster and more efficiently.

I've been studying the Chinese language since 2006 and I can tell you that this is a marathon, not a sprint. In my opinion, it's best to choose a specific area of Chinese study (oral Chinese, written, writing, etc.) and focus on that instead of doing everything at once.

My desire for you is that the experience I'm able to share with different services and tools will be helpful as you plan out your next steps for learning the Chinese language.

Best of luck!

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TravelChinaCheaper
Let's start by breaking down the four different aspects of the Chinese language that we can study. You can focus on learning how to:

* Speak Chinese (Oral)
* Write Chinese
* Read Chinese
* Listen to Chinese

Although it's tempting to want to do it all at once, as I mentioned above, I recommend trying to focus on one at time. If you're not sure where to start and you're a beginner, your best bet is to focus on speaking.

The following guide is broken out into sections that touch on each of these aspects of learning the Chinese language. Click on your area of interest or just scroll down to see them all!
Being able to communicate with spoken Chinese is probably one of the most important things you can learn. There are countless ways to do this, so let's consider your two options: immersive learning and learning on your own.

Immersion Learning in China

What better way to learn Chinese than moving to China?! If you have the time and ability, moving to China is by far one of the best ways you can improve your Chinese language skills quickly.

This can be done in a number of ways including:

- **Studying at a Chinese University**: Unless you have a contact in China, it may seem daunting to apply to a university in China. In reality, it's quite easy. There are companies like CUCAS that not only help you apply to a Chinese university, but they can also help you get a scholarship!

- **Language Immersion Program**: These type of programs go a step beyond studying at a Chinese university. In these programs, you move to an environment in China where you speak Chinese 24/7 - at your homestay, at the school...everywhere. It's intense, but you learn fast! There are many of these programs, but a good example would be the LTL Mandarin School.

- **Working in China**: If you can't afford to pay out of pocket to move to China, working is an alternative that will get you in the country. Beware, though: it's hard to learn the language when everybody you is either an expat or they are Chinese students who really want to learn English from you!
Learning to Speak Chinese on Your Own

If moving to China isn't an option for you, don't despair! There are still a number of great ways to improve your spoken Chinese without relocating yourself to the other side of the globe.

While there are countless Chinese "courses" that try to cover everything under the sun, I'd like to highlight a few tools and services that I've used to learn to specifically SPEAK Chinese better.

For those who need the flexibility to study on their own time and at their own pace, the Rosetta Stone program is an excellent way to focus on your speaking.

My favorite way to practice speaking Mandarin Chinese is with a real Chinese person. That's why these Skype tutoring sessions are amazing. Try one session for free here:
Learning to write Chinese characters is an admittedly challenging yet extremely rewarding endeavor. The Chinese method of teaching characters is rote memory and endless repetition. Thankfully, we now have technology called SRS (spaced repetition system) that helps to push characters from your short-term memory into your long-term memory.

A Quick Note About Writing

I want to make one quick observation about writing Chinese that I think is very important. The tools that I want to share with you for learning to write Chinese are amazing tools, but there's a catch: they all teach you to write on a phone or tablet screen.

Like it or not, writing on a screen is not the same as putting pen to paper. If you really want your Chinese characters to look nice, you're going to want to take what you're learning with these tools and then practice them with a pen and paper. Write a letter to your friend or a simple essay. It doesn't matter...just write!
The following tools are some of my absolute favorites when it comes to learning how to write Chinese characters. I've learned hundreds of characters in a single month by taking advantage of the writing and SRS systems!

Skriter is, hands down, my absolute favorite tool to help me learn to write Chinese. It's fun, the app for my phone and tablet are easy to use, and it utilizes the SRS system to know when to quiz me on characters I may be forgetting.

The book Remembering Simplified Hanzi has been a student favorite for a while now. It's a method to remember how to write characters based on mnemonics and creating stories to help you remember. It's surprisingly fun and easy!

Try Skriter

Buy on Amazon
It's odd to think that the skills you need to read and write Chinese are different, and yet they are. You need to focus on each in order to develop them or else you'll only be good at one or the other.

FYI...There will be no Flashcards Here!
Warning: I love using flashcards in order to help me remember certain words I'm forgetting, but they are a horrible tool for learning to read Chinese.

The best way to learn is by ACTUALLY READING. Imagine that ;)

So instead of sharing with you a bunch of flashcard apps (of which there are literally hundreds), I'd like to present some alternative ideas that can both help you learn how to read and be fun at the same time!
Best Tools for Learning to Read Chinese

The most popular method among language learning experts for learning how to read Chinese is something known as "graded readers". These are books and stories written at a specific language level, using only a certain number of words and introducing new ones within an appropriate context.

You're learning like a kid does, and it works.

Here are two of my favorite tools that I use to learn how to read Chinese:

The Chairman's Bao is a great new tool that uses current news translated into different levels of Chinese. You pick your level and you can even click on words you don't know to see their meaning.

Try Chairman's Bao

The Mandarin Companion books are another fun way to read because they use familiar stories coupled with excellent illustrations. The books can be bought as both ebooks and paperback books.

Shop on Amazon
Listening to Chinese

It can be discouraging when you first start speaking with a Chinese person to realize just how hard it is to hear and understand what is being said, especially if it's being spoken quickly!

Thankfully, there are a number of great ways to improve your Chinese listening skills and most of them can be done while you're driving on the road or just taking a jog outside.

One of my favorite podcasts when I first started learning Chinese was ChinesePod. While the podcast is still good, they've now expanded to include so much more in their language learning package. Try them for free for 30 days to see if it's right for you.

I can't choose a favorite here, so I have to go with two :) FluentU is great because it uses TV shows and movies to help you listen to Chinese as it is spoken by the locals. It's also a really fun way to learn Chinese. Ha!

Try ChinesePod

Check out FluentU

Learn Chinese Online | 75 Best Mandarin Chinese Learning Tools
That's it! Of course, there are plenty of other amazing resources and tools that you can use to learn, but these are my favorites. If you'd like to dig even deeper, check out some of these resources on the Travel China Cheaper blog. I hope you enjoyed this language resource!

Other Great Language Resources