

MANDARIN CHINESE · BEGINNER REFERENCE

Telling the Time in Mandarin

Six words unlock the clock 一点 (o'clock), 分 (minutes), 半 (half past) and 刻 (quarter), plus the parts of the day. Learn to read and say any time with confidence.

点

diǎn
o'clock

分

fēn
minutes

半

bàn
half past

刻

kè
quarter

差

chà
to (before)

现在几上午下

01 Six words unlock the clock

Chinese time is refreshingly logical. Learn these six words and you can say almost any time of day — number first, then the time word.

点 diǎn
o'clock

The hour word. Number in front: 三点 = 3 o'clock. Add 钟 zhōng for a round hour → 三点钟.

八点
bā diǎn
8 o'clock

分 fēn
minutes

Minutes after the hour + 分. For minutes 1-9, slot in 零 líng ("oh").

三点零五分
sān diǎn líng wǔ fēn
3:05

半 bàn
half past

Half hour = hour + 半. No number needed — literally "nine o'clock half".

九点半
jiǔ diǎn bàn
9:30

刻 kè
quarter

One 刻 = 15 min. 一刻 = quarter past, 三刻 = three-quarters past.

两点一刻
liǎng diǎn yí kè
2:15

差 chà
to (before)

差 chà = "lacking". Use it for minutes to the hour — "lacking a quarter, eight".

差一刻八点
chà yí kè bā diǎn
quarter to 8

两 liǎng / èr
2 o'clock

2 o'clock is 两点, never 二点. But minutes still use 二 — the classic beginner slip.

两点二十分
liǎng diǎn èr shí fēn
2:20

How to build any clock time

PART OF DAY HOUR + 点 MINUTES + 分

下午 + **三点** + **二十分**

= 下午三点二十分 · xiàwǔ sān diǎn èrshí fēn · 3:20 in the afternoon



Hear every time spoken — set any time on the interactive clock

The online version has a live clock and combination builder with native audio (Microsoft Xiaoxiao neural) — set a time and hear it instantly.

willychina.com/resources/telling-time-in-mandarin/

02 Say which part of the day

Mandarin leads with the time of day, then the clock time — 下午三点 = 3 in the afternoon.

凌晨

língchén
pre-dawn
1-5 am

早上

zǎoshang
early morning
6-8 am

上午

shàngwǔ
forenoon
9-11 am

中午

zhōngwǔ
midday
~12 pm

下午

xiàwǔ
afternoon
1-5 pm

傍晚

bàngwǎn
dusk
~6 pm

晚上

wǎnshang
evening
7-11 pm

半夜

bànyè
midnight
~12 am

03 Asking about the time

现在几点?

xiànzài jǐ diǎn?
What time is it now?

几点开始?

jǐ diǎn kāi shǐ?
What time does it start?

你几点起床?

nǐ jǐ diǎn qǐ chuáng?
What time do you get up?

我们八点见。

wǒmen bā diǎn jiàn.
Let's meet at eight.

04 Three common mistakes

Using 二 for 2 o'clock

✗ 二点 ✓ 两点
2 o'clock is always 两点; minutes keep 二 (二十).

Mixing 分 with 分钟

✗ 三点二十分钟 ✓ 三点二十分
A clock time takes 分; 分钟 is a duration.

Dropping 零 for single minutes

✗ 六点五分 ✓ 六点零五分
Single-digit minutes take 零 líng ("oh").

Three more time words worth knowing

整 zhěng — on the dot. 八点整 = eight o'clock sharp.

小时 xiǎoshí — hours (length). 三个小时 = three hours long.

左右 zuǒyòu — around. 三点左右 = about three o'clock.



FROM THE WILLYCHINA RESOURCE LIBRARY

Ready to use these in real conversation?

A cheat sheet gets the rules into your head — but speaking them naturally takes a native ear. WillyChina pairs you with native and professional Mandarin teachers who build your confidence one conversation at a time. Book a 30-minute intro lesson and see if it's a fit.

[Book a 30-minute intro lesson →](#)

MORE MANDARIN RESOURCES FROM WILLYCHINA

01

Chinese Numbers 1-100

[willychina.com/resources/
chinese-numbers-1-100](https://willychina.com/resources/chinese-numbers-1-100)

02

Mandarin Tones Cheatsheet

[willychina.com/resources/
mandarin-tones-cheatsheet](https://willychina.com/resources/mandarin-tones-cheatsheet)

03

Complete Pinyin Chart

[willychina.com/resources/
pinyin-chart](https://willychina.com/resources/pinyin-chart)