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Getting started with Chinese 3

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About this free course

This free course is an adapted extract from the Open University course developed from extract parts of LXC003 - *Beginners Chinese 3:* 开始吧 *kāishǐ ba!* - http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/short-courses/lxc003.

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Getting started with Chinese 3

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Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

Contents

Introduction

Introduction

Welcome to *Getting started with Chinese 3*!

Little by little you will be improving your ability to make more sophisticated conversations and to understand more complex language structures in a variety of different scenarios. You will also find out related cultural information about China and other Chinese-speaking countries.

Each week comprises 3-4 hours of interactive activities, explanations and tips about language learning. It is a good idea to keep notes either on paper or electronically on your preferred digital device so that you can keep track of your progress. At the end of each week you will have a quiz section with questions to revise what you have been learning and check your progress. Each week has consolidation and extension activities, and you will be encouraged to build your own language notebook little by little. You will also be able to add your personal reflections using our online note boxes and decide how you can best go about memorising and practising key phrases and characters.

One important thing to do before you start is to take some time to decide how you will allocate your time to your studies. Learning Chinese, like learning any language, is a gradual process; it's often described as a 'marathon, not a sprint.' Little and often is the best approach, so if possible, spread your 3-4 hours over the week, rather than devoting one whole afternoon or evening. This will give you plenty of opportunities to revisit vocabulary and language structures, to revise quickly what you did last time, and above all to practise and consolidate. This is the best way to learn vocabulary and perfect your pronunciation and tones. You can also look at the 'Pronunciation Guide' to improve your accuracy and tones. If you are keen to learn characters, you can make paper flashcards or use some apps such as Quizlet to make digital flashcards. If you are not quite sure about how to type Chinese characters or use Chinese fonts, visit '
Enabling Chinese fonts and typing characters'.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- describe objects and people, including one's appearance and state and be able to indicate a change of state
- recognise the Chinese concept of beauty
- form comparisons freely using bǐ 比 and the adjectives studied
- recognise some character head components as well as four-character idioms
- understand register in the Chinese language.

Open Centre for Languages and Cultures

This course has been developed from extract parts of
LXC003 - *Beginners Chinese 3: 开始吧 kāishǐ ba!*. The Open University has launched a dedicated learning centre called The Open Centre for Languages and Cultures. OpenLearn is supporting this project and is providing extracted units of all courses on The Open Centre in our dedicated Languages and Cultures Hub.

The Open Centre for Languages and Cultures is the exciting new home for non-accredited language and intercultural communication short courses. You can study a wide range of language and language related subjects with us anywhere in the world, in any time zone, whatever your motivation – leisure, professional development or academic.

It's the one stop shop for engaging with languages, professional communication and intercultural dialogue.

Our short courses allow us to be agile and responsive to the needs of learners who want to be part of a global society. We offer non-accredited short courses in a range of subjects including modern languages and languages for business and the workplace. We are also leading the way in developing short courses for academic research methods and pre-sessional English with IELTS, which will be available for registration in due course.

The Open Centre for Languages and Cultures is an international leader in online language learning and intercultural communications, built on our pioneering pedagogy and research.

What makes the Open Centre different?

- The OU is the leader in online learning and teaching with a heritage of more than 50 years helping students achieve their learning ambitions.

- The short courses are underpinned by academic rigour and designed by native speakers experienced in producing engaging materials for online learning of languages and cultures.

- The graduating nature of the courses means that learners can build up their language and skills over time.

- Learners will also gain a better understanding of the culture(s) associated with the language(s) they study enabling the development of intercultural communication skills.

- Learners can mix and match the short courses and study more than one course at a time.

Once this course is complete you will be directed to OpenLearn's hub for language content where you will be able to build on your newly found language skills.

Now that you are fully prepared, 开始吧 *kāishǐ ba* on Week 1.

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Week 1: Long-time no see, you have become taller!

Introduction

Language study is the accumulation of vocabulary and grammar. This week, you will start by building your vocabulary with terms in relation to family members, adjectives describing state and feeling, and some occupations. You will then be introduced to more adjectives which will enable you to better describe objects as well as one's appearance and state. In addition, you will learn how to indicate a change of state.

lxc003_wk1_intro_f001>

As you explore the Chinese culture this week, you will journey through the Chinese concept of beauty. To test your understanding and revise the key language structures and vocabulary covered in this week, there is a Quiz section. This is followed by sections for consolidation and extension of your learning, where as well as practising further you can reflect on what you have learnt and your learning experience of this week. Also, in this

part, you will be introduced to some character head components. Understanding head components will help you to recognise characters and form meaning associations.

*kāishǐ ba*开始吧！(Let's start!)

Audio content is not available in this format.

1 Preparation

To start this week you will study some vocabulary that you may or may not have already learnt in previous Chinese studies. Don't worry if you're not familiar with all of the words; Activities 1, 2 and 3 will help to prepare you before you expand on this knowledge during the rest of the week.

Activity 1

Match the Chinese phrases for family members and other generic people terms to their English translation by dragging and dropping the characters next to the corresponding English translation.

bàba 爸爸

māma 妈妈

jiějie 姐姐

gēge 哥哥

mèimei 妹妹

dìdi 弟弟

xiānsheng 先生

tàitai 太太

lǎoshī 老师

péngyou 朋友

Match each of the items above to an item below.

father

mother

elder sister

elder brother

younger sister

younger brother

husband

wife

teacher

friend

Activity 2

Part 1

Match the Chinese adjectives to their English translation.

róngyì 容易

lèi 累

kě 渴

è 饿

hǎo 好

nán 难

Match each of the items above to an item below.

easy

tired

thirsty

hungry

good

difficult

Part 2

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Activity 3

Listen to the recording where you will hear a description of Wang Ming's family.

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Interactive content is not available in this format.

2 Adjectives – building your vocabulary

Table 1 shows adjectives which can be used to describe people's appearance and status. Listen to how they are pronounced and repeat afterwards. Listen as many times as you wish.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Table 1 Adjectives to describe one's appearance

kù	酷	cool (great)
shuài	帅	handsome
cōngmíng	聪明	clever
làngmàn	浪漫	romantic
piàoliang	漂亮	pretty, beautiful
gāo	高	tall (person or building), high
pàng	胖	fat, stout
shòu	瘦	thin (person)
shǎo	少	few; less
ǎi	矮	short (height)
yǒuqián	有钱	rich (lit. have money)
méiqián	没钱	poor (lit. have no money)
yǒuyòng	有用	useful
yuǎn	远	far
jìn	近	near, close

Now have a go at Activity 4.

Activity 4

Part 1

Match the Chinese adjectives to their English translation.

kù 酷

 piàoliang 漂亮

làngmàn 浪漫

shuài 帅

---

cōngmíng 聪明

Match each of the items above to an item below.

cool

pretty

romantic

 handsome

 clever

Part 2

Match the antonyms of these Chinese adjectives.

yuǎn 远

pàng 胖

yǒuqián 有钱

gāo 高

Match each of the items above to an item below.

jìn 近

shòu 瘦

méiqián 没钱

ǎi 矮

3 Useful greetings

In this section you'll look at different ways to greet using both formal and colloquial expressions.

Activity 5

Read the greetings below and turn them into Chinese. Write your answers in your language notebook in either Pinyin or characters and then check against the answers by clicking the reveal button.

- Hello!
- Hello (polite form)!
- Are you well?
- Good morning!

Answer

- Hello! *Nǐ hǎo!* 你好！
- Hello (polite form)! *Nín hǎo!* 您好！
- Are you well? *Nǐ hǎo ma?* 你好吗？
- Good morning! *Zǎoshang hǎo!* 早上好！

---

hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn 好久不见

hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn 好久不见 is a modern idiom, commonly used when greeting a friend that you haven't seen for a long time. The word *hǎo* 好（good）functions here as an adverb meaning 'very', so the expression literally means 'very long no see', which can be translated as 'it's been a long time' or 'long time no see'.

Xiǎoyuè, hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn! Nǐ hǎo ma? 小月，好久不见！你好吗？

(Xiaoyue, it's been a long time! How you are?)

Wǒ hǎo máng. 我好忙。

(I'm very busy.)

Note that in the response *hǎo* 好 is used colloquially as an adverb. In writing or more formal situations *hěn* 很 would be used instead.

zěnme yàng 怎么样

zěnme yàng 怎么样 is another colloquial expression meaning 'how are you?' or 'how are things?'

Xiǎoyuè, hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn！Zěnme yàng? 小月，好久不见！怎么样？

Xiaoyue, long time no see! How are things?

---

zěnme yàng 怎么样 can also be put after a pronoun or noun to ask about other people or things:

Nǐ mā ma zěnme yàng? 你妈妈怎么样？

How is your mother?

Zhè běn shū zěnme yàng? 这本书怎么样？

How is this book?

Activity 6

Part 1

Read the following questions and answers. Pair them by dragging and dropping the answer next to its corresponding question.

Hěn hǎo hē. 很好喝。

Hěn hǎo chī. 很好吃。

Yǒudiǎnr lèi. 有点儿累。

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Déguó píjiǔ zěnme yàng? 德国啤酒怎么样？

Běijīng kǎoyā zěnme yàng? 北京烤鸭怎么样？

Nǐ jīntiān zěnme yàng? 你今天怎么样？

Part 2

Read the following short exchanges. Complete each blank with the most appropriate greeting from the drop-down list. Each greeting can only be used once.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

4 'Topic + comment' sentences

When it comes describing people and objects, the most common sentence structure is 'topic + comment'. The subject which is being described is the 'topic' and the adjective that appears afterwards is the 'comment'.

The 'topic' can be a person represented by a pronoun, as below:

Nǐ zěnme yàng? 你怎么样？

How are you doing?

Wǒ hěn hǎo. 我很好。

I am good. / I am very good.

Tā èrshí suì. 他二十岁。

He is twenty years old.

The 'topic' can also be a verbal phrase or an adjective, whereas the 'comment' is often an adjective which functions as the predicate.

Xué Zhōngwén *bù nán.* 学中文不难。

Learning Chinese is not hard.

Shòu *bù hǎo.* 瘦不好。

lit. thin not good (Being thin is not good.)

Apart from describing people's feelings, state and age, the "topic" + comment' pattern is also often used to describe days and dates:

Míngtiān xīngqí jǐ? 明天星期几？

What day is it tomorrow?

Jīntiān sān yuè yī hào. 今天三月一号。

Today is the 1st of March.

Activity 7

Take a closer look at the examples above. Structurally, how are the Chinese 'topic + comment' sentences different from the English ones? (Hint: try to spot two differences!)

> *Provide your answer...*
>
> ---
>
> Discussion
>
> - In the Chinese sentences, the verb *shì* 是 (to be) is not present.
> - In the sentence '*Wǒ hěn hǎo.* 我很好。' *hěn* 很 could mean 'very', or it could also be left out in the translation.

Here are a few things to bear in mind:

- When forming a "topic" + comment' sentence, the verb *shì* 是 'to be' is **not** required.
- In an affirmative "topic" + comment' sentence, when the comment is a single unmodified adjective, the adverb *hěn* 很 is a link which is often required, however it doesn't necessarily have to be translated into 'very':

  Tā hěn lèi. 他很累。He is tired. / He is very tired.

  Without *hěn* 很, the sentence would be ungrammatical (note that the symbol of * marks the sentence is ungrammatical): * *Tā lèi.* 他累。

  However, if the 'comment' adjective is already modified by an adverb or if the statement is negative, then there is no need to add *hěn* 很:

  Tā yǒudiǎnr lèi. 他有点儿累。 lit. he a little bit tired. (He is slightly tired.)

  Tā bú lèi. 他不累。 lit. He no tired. (He is not tired.)

Activity 8

Part 1

Listen to the audio where you will hear a question in Chinese. Record your response following the prompts, before comparing it with the model provided in the feedback. You can record yourself as many times as you wish by clicking 'Re-record' or 'Start again'; your last recording will be saved.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Part 2

Choose the Chinese translation that is grammatically correct and most appropriate.

France is not far.

- ○ *Fǎguó bù yuǎn.* 法国不远。
- ○ *Fǎguó hěn bù yuǎn.* 法国很不远。
- ○ *Fǎguó bú shì yuǎn.* 法国不是远。

My teacher is busy.

- ○ *Wǒ de lǎoshī hěn máng.* 我的老师很忙。
- ○ *Wǒ de lǎoshī shì máng.* 我的老师是忙。

○ *Wǒ de lǎoshī máng.* 我的老师忙。

Part 3

Write down these phrases in Chinese in your language notebook and check them against the answers afterwards.

1. It is useful to study Chinese.
2. My friend is poor.

Answer

1. *Xué Zhōngwén hěn yǒuyòng.* 学中文很有用。
2. *Wǒ de péngyǒu méi qián.* 我的朋友没钱。

5 Using *le* 了 to indicate change of state

The sentence particle *le* 了 can be added to the end of a clause or sentence to indicate that a situation or state is new or different from how it was before:

Wǒ xué Zhōngwén. 我学中文。I learn Chinese.

Wǒ xué Zhōngwén le. 我学中文了。I have started learning Chinese.

---

le 了 can also be added to an adjective or to a number (e.g. when talking about age, height, or weight) to indicate change or updating:

Nǐ hěnpàng. 你很胖。 You are overweight.

Nǐ pàng le. 你胖了。 (Implication: you were not fat before.) You've put on some weight. / You are putting on some weight.

Wǒ èrshí le. 我二十了。 (Implication: I was not 20 before.) I am 20 now. / I've turned 20.

Activity 9

Part 1

Read the following two sentences carefully. How are they different in meaning? Take notes and then reveal the discussion.

> *Tā yǒu nǚ péngyou.* 他有女朋友。
>
> *Tā yǒu nǚ péngyou le.* 他有女朋友了。

Discussion

English translations:

> *Tā yǒu nǚ péngyou.* 他有女朋友。 He has a girlfriend.
>
> *Tā yǒu nǚ péngyou le.* 他有女朋友了。 He has a girlfriend now. (*le* 了 indicates that he didn't used to.)

Part 2

Construct these English sentences in Chinese by dragging and dropping the given words into the right order.

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Interactive content is not available in this format.

Now have a go at speaking Chinese using the scenarios given in Activity 10.

Activity 10

How would you communicate in Chinese in the following situations?

Press the 'Start recording' button once to start, and then click again when you have finished your recording. Once recorded you can listen to yourself, and then compare it to the model answer which is provided in the feedback. The transcript is available if needed.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

6 文化 Culture: the Chinese concept of beauty

Traditionally in China, fair skin, small feet and looking a bit plump were regarded as marks of beauty.

Foot binding was a custom practised on young girls and women for about a thousand years until it ended in the early twentieth century. It was a very cruel practice that involved breaking the arch of the foot, folding the toes with great force into the sole of the foot and fixing everything in position with bandages. It took approximately two years of bandaging and re-bandaging the foot to achieve the desired effect. A foot that measured between three and three and a half inches from toe to heel was regarded as the ideal and was known as *sān cùn jīn lián* 三寸金莲 (lit. three-inch golden lotus). While foot binding could lead to serious infections, possibly gangrene, and generally caused lifelong pain, women did it because at the time it was considered that a woman with big feet would have difficulty in finding a husband.
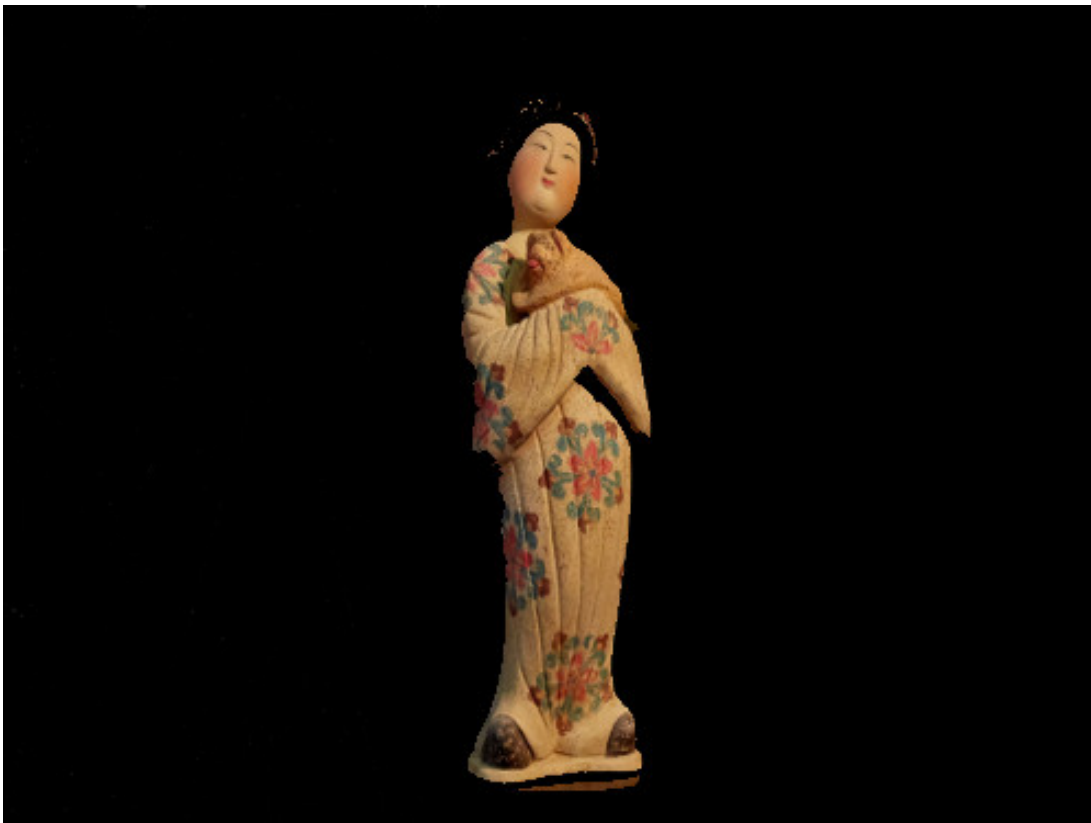
As for skin colour, even today many Chinese people prefer to have fair skin and go out of their way to keep out of the sun. However, tanned skin is increasingly desirable for its associations with a healthy lifestyle and having the means to go on holidays.

The word *pàng* 胖 (fat) also used to be associated with wealth and good health – perhaps due to the fact that food was often in short supply, and so it was a blessing if you could afford to put on weight. For men, it was almost a status symbol to be fat. Being overweight was also associated with being relaxed, as in the phrase *xīn kuān tǐ pàng* 心宽体胖 (relaxed and happy; lit. heart wide body fat).

Body image is changing, however. In the old days, the phrase *nǐ pàng le* 你胖了 (you've put on some weight) would have been received as a compliment. Nowadays, although the phrase is still widely used by older people, most young people prefer to be slim and would no longer take it in the same spirit!

7 What would you say?

In the next activity, you will practise your spoken Chinese in the different scenarios set out.

Activity 11

Part 1

You meet an old friend you have not seen for a while. Listen to the audio to hear what your friend says to you. Then record your response following the prompts, before comparing it with the model provided in the feedback. You can record yourself as many times as you wish by pressing 'Re-record' or 'Start again'; your last recording will be saved.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Part 2

How do you say the following sentences in Chinese? Speak your answer out loud and record yourself. Press the 'Start recording' button once to start, and then click again when you have finished your recording. Listen to yourself speaking and then compare it to the model answer provided in the feedback. The transcript is also available.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

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8 Character combination and word formation

Words in Chinese are formed by one or more characters. Below are some combinations of characters to understand how each word is formed.

hǎo 好 (very) + *jiǔ* 久 (long) + *bú* 不 (no) + *jiàn* 见 (to meet; to see) → *hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn* 好久不见 (long time no see; haven't seen you for ages)

---

zěnme 怎么 (how) + *yàng* 样 (manner, method) → *zěnme yàng* 怎么样 (How are you? How are things?)

---

yǒu 有 (to have) + *qián* 钱 (money) → yǒuqián 有钱 (rich)

---

yǒu 有 (to have) + *yòng* 用 (to use) → *yǒuyòng* 有用 (useful)

---

méi 没 (no, not) + *qián* 钱 (money) → *méiqián* 没钱 (poor)

Activity 12

Below is some new vocabulary made up of words and phrases you have already learnt. Study the meaning of each individual character in each combination. Can you work out the meaning of each new word/phrase? Match each of them with its English equivalent.

yǒuqiánrén 有钱人

gāodà 高大

fùyǒu 富有

shòuxiǎo 瘦小

méiyòng 没用

Match each of the items above to an item below.

rich people

tall and big

wealthy

thin and small

useless

9 Build a language notebook

It's now time to reflect on your learning this week.

Activity 13

Part 1

What would you write in each box below, if anything? Would you add more categories?

Table 2 Language notebook

Key vocabulary and phrases	Provide your answer...
Key sentences	Provide your answer...
Key language structures	Provide your answer...
Culture notes	Provide your answer...
What I found straightforward / I have enjoyed learning	Provide your answer...
What I found difficult	Provide your answer...
Action plan	Provide your answer...

Discussion

This is something you can develop week by week, in a way which is entirely personal to you. You may find that the way you go about it changes as you progress. The important thing is that you find a way to note down, each week, new vocabulary and expressions, and also tips about learning grammar, culture and communication in general that will support you as you learn more.

Here is an example of what your language notebook might look like. You may have filled the table differently, or you may have a different idea about how to build your language notebook. That is completely fine!

Table 3 Example of a completed language notebook for Week 1

Key vocabulary and phrases	*kù* 酷	cool
	shuài 帅	handsome
	cōngmíng 聪明	clever
	làngmàn 浪漫	romantic
	piàoliang 漂亮	pretty
	gāo 高	tall
	ǎi 矮	short
	pàng 胖	fat
	shòu 瘦	thin
	yǒuqián 有钱	rich
	méiqián 没钱	poor
	…zěnme yàng …怎么样？	How is/are …?
Key sentences	*Nǐ zěnme yàng?* 你怎么样？	How are you?
	Tā hěn gāo. 他很高。	He is tall.
	Shuō Zhōngwén hěn kù! 说中文很酷！	Speaking Chinese is cool.
	Wǒ èrshí le. 我二十了。	I have turned 20.
	Wǒ hǎo yīdiǎnr le. 我好一点儿了。	I am slightly better.

Key language structures	• 'topic + comment' sentence. • The 'topic' could be a noun, a verb phrase or an adjective. The 'comment' is often an adjective. • There is no *shì* 是 (to be) in 'topic + comment' sentences. • In a 'topic + comment' sentence, when the comment is a single adjective, *hěn* 很 must be present as a link: topic + *hěn* 很 + adjective. In these cases, *hěn* 很 could be translated into the adverb 'very' or left out in the translation.
Culture notes	Chinese concept of beauty.
What I found straightforward / I have enjoyed learning	• Chinese terms for kinship. • How the concept of beauty differs between the East and the West.
What I found difficult	• There were lot of new adjectives to learn. • The Chinese 'topic+comment' structure is not exactly the same as it is in English, primarily the absence of *shì* 是 and the presence of *hěn* 很.
Action plan	• Keep building my learning journal on a weekly basis. • Write an email to or text a Chinese friend and practice 'topic+comment' sentence. • Treat myself to a nice Chinese meal for the hard work I have put in this week, but I must order it in Chinese!

10 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 1 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new window or tab (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link), then return here when you have done it.

11 Practising and consolidating

Regularly practising and consolidating – using a 'little and often' method – is considered the best way to learn vocabulary and language structures, and perfect your pronunciation and tones. Activity 14 will help you to revise some of the key vocabulary and language structures you've learned this week.

Activity 14

Part 1

Match the 'topic + comment' sentences to their English translation.

Tā nán péngyou bú shuài. 她男朋友不帅。

Shuō Zhōngwén hěn kù. 说中文很酷。

Zhè ge diànyǐng hěn làngmàn. 这个电影很浪漫。

Wǒ bàba yǒudiǎnr pàng. 我爸爸有点儿胖。

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Her boyfriend is not handsome.

Speaking Chinese is cool.

This film is romantic.

My dad is slightly overweight.

Part 2

Read the following text and select all the true statements.

Wǒ nán péngyou shì Yīngguó rén. Tā hěn gāo, yǒudiǎnr pàng, kěshì hěn shuài! Tā xué Zhōngwén le. Tā hěn cōngmíng! Kěshì tā bú rènshi hěn duō hànzì.

我男朋友是英国人。他很高，有点儿胖，可是很帅！他学中文了。他很聪明！可是他不认识很多汉字。

☐ My boyfriend is little bit overweight.

☐ My boyfriend is Chinese.

☐ My boyfriend has started learning Chinese.

☐ My boyfriend knows very many Chinese characters.

☐ My boyfriend is clever.

Answer

The correct answers are:

My boyfriend is a little bit overweight.

My boyfriend has started learning Chinese.

My boyfriend is clever.

The translation of the text is:

My boyfriend is British. He is tall and he is slightly overweight, but he is handsome! He has started learning Chinese. He is clever but he doesn't know many Chinese characters.

12 Practising and expanding: character head components 月 and 心

The 月 head component has two meaning associations:

- The first association is with the moon – normally when it appears on the right side of a character: *míng* 明 (bright).
- The other association is with the body or flesh – normally when it appears on the left side of a character and sometimes at the bottom: *pàng* 胖 (fat) *yǒu* 有 (to have).

yuè 月 also functions as an independent character, as in *sānyuè* 三月 (March).

Characters that contain the 心 head component usually have something to do with emotions and/or thinking: *gǎn* 感 (to feel). *xīn* 心 is also an independent character, meaning 'heart'. The expression *xīnshàngrén* 心上人 (lit. person in the heart) refers to the person one is in love with.

Table 4 Character head components 月 and 心

Head component	Meaning association	Name of head component	Examples
月	moon, flesh	*yuè zì páng* 月字旁 (lit. moon character side)	*péng* 朋 (friend)
心	heart	*xīn zì páng* 心字旁 (lit. moon character side)	*xiǎng* 想 (to think)

Activity 15

You have just come across *xīn* 心 (heart). Below are some adjectives that include *xīn* 心. Research the meaning of *yòng* 用，*kāi* 开，*hǎo* 好，and *fàng* 放 and try to work out the meaning of these new adjectives. Match them with their English equivalent.

yònggōng 用心

kāixīn 开心

hǎoxīn 好心

fàngxīn 放心

Match each of the items above to an item below.

attentive

happy

kindness

relieved

---

13 Summary of Week 1

Now you have reached the end of Week 1, reflect a little on what you have learnt.

Activity 16

In the box below, note down what you have found easy, useful or fun, and what was more difficult.

Provide your answer...

Next week, we will learn how to form comparisons so that you can further describe people and objects. Why don't you make a head start by researching the key character *bǐ* 比.

Xià xīngqī jiàn. 下星期见. See you next week.

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In this phrase, *xià* 下 means 'the next, the following' rather than indicating the physical location 'below'. You can understand this phrase by visualising a calendar – the following week is located underneath the current one.

You can now move on to Week 2.

Week 2: My dad is older than my mum

Introduction

This week, you will further explore ways of describing people and objects, in particular, how to compare them using *bǐ* 比. By the end of the week, you will be able to form comparisons freely using the adjectives you studied last week.

As you explore Chinese culture this week, you will be introduced to *four-character idioms*. These are special sayings which you can use to impress your Chinese friends! To test your understanding and revise the key language structures and vocabulary covered in this week, there is a Quiz section. This is followed by sections for consolidation and extension of your learning, where apart from further practice there will be time for you to reflect on what you have learned and your learning experience of the week. In this section, you will also learn about register in the Chinese language.

Nǐ zhǔnbèi hǎo le ma? 你准备好了吗？ Are you ready?

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1 Revision

A lot of this week's knowledge is built from what you learnt last week, in particular, the sentence structure of 'topic + comment' and the use of *le* 了 to indicate change of state. Before you dive into the new stuff, complete Activity 1 as a quick revision of Week 1.

Activity 1

Read the text below and choose the most appropriate answers to the English questions that follow.

> *Wǒ mèimei de nán péngyou shì Déguó rén. Tā bù gāo, yǒudiǎnr shòu. Kěshì tā hěn shuài! Tā hěn cōngmíng, yě hěn yǒu qián! Tā xué Fǎwén le.*
>
> 我妹妹的男朋友是德国人。他不高，有点儿瘦。可是他很帅！他很聪明，也很有钱！他学法文了。

What is the nationality of my sister's boyfriend?

○ Japanese.

○ Chinese.

○ French.

○ German.

What does my sister's boyfriend look like?

○ He is not very handsome.

○ He is a bit slim.

○ He is tall.

○ He is overweight.

What one of these statements about my sister's boyfriend is NOT true?

○ He is rich.

○ He is handsome.

○ He is poor.

○ He is clever.

What's changed in my sister's boyfriend life?

○ He has started learning French.

○ He has grown taller.

○ He has become richer.

○ He has lost weight.

Answer

Here is the translation:

Wǒ mèimei de nán péngyou shì Déguó rén. Tā bù gāo, yǒudiǎnr shòu. Kěshì tā hěn shuài! Tā hěn cōngmíng, yě hěn yǒu qián! Tā xué Fǎwén le.

我妹妹的男朋友是德国人。他不高，有点儿瘦。可是他很帅！他很聪明，也很有钱！他学法文了。

My younger sister's boyfriend is German. He is not tall and a little bit thin. But he is very handsome! He is smart and rich! He has started learning French.

---

2 Changing adjectives into noun phrases

Some adjectives can be turned into nouns or noun phrases by adding *de* 的 at the end. For example:

dà 大 (large) + *de* 的 (particle) → *dàde* 大的 (the large one)

yǒuqián 有钱 (rich) + *de* 的 (particle) → *yǒuqián de* 有钱的 (the rich)

Activity 2

Choose either an adjective or a noun to complete the Chinese sentences below.

Wǒ yǒu yī ge _____ *péngyou.* 我有一个_____朋友。

○ *hǎo* 好

○ *hǎo de* 好的

Tā xǐhuan _____ *háishì xiǎo de?* 他喜欢 _____ 还是小的？

○ *dà* 大

○ *dà de* 大的

_____ *shì wǒ jiějie.* _____ 是我姐姐。

○ *gāo* 高的

○ *gāo de* 高

3 Comparisons with *bǐ* 比

The most common way of making comparisons in Chinese is to use the word *bǐ* 比 (compared with). To form a comparative structure, insert *bǐ* 比 between the two things or people that are being compared and add a relevant adjective at the end of the sentence.

'Wang Jing is taller than Li Yue.'

Table 1 Forming the comparison sentence 'Wang Jing is taller than Li Yue'

A	*bǐ*	B	Adj.
Wáng Jīng	*bǐ*	!Warning! DengXian not supported*Lǐ Yuè*	*gāo.*
王京	比	李月	高。
lit. *Wang Jing*	compared	*Li Yue*	tall

'My elder sister's Chinese is better than mine.'

Table 2 Forming the comparison sentence 'My elder sister's Chinese is better than mine'

Wǒ jiějie de Zhōngwén	*bǐ*	*wǒde*	*hǎo.*
我姐姐的中文	比	我	好。
lit. my elder sister's Chinese	compared	mine	good

'My mum is older than my dad.'

Table 3 Forming the comparison sentence 'My mum is older than my dad'

Wǒ māma	!Warning! DengXian not supported*bǐ*	!Warning! DengXian not supported*wǒ bàba*	*dà*
我妈妈	比	我爸爸	大。
lit. my mum	compared	my dad	big

Note when the adjective *dà* 大, normally used to describe the size of objects, is used to describe people's age rather than body size. *lǎo* 老 (old) is used when comparing elderly people's ages:

Wǒ nǎinai bǐ wǒ yé ye lǎo. 我奶奶比我爷爷老。

(My grandma is older than my grandad.)

Activity 3

Part 1

Wǒ māma bǐ wǒ bàba dà 我妈妈比我爸爸大。

My mum is older than my dad.

As shown in the example above, it appears that normally the verb *shì* 是 is not required when forming a comparison sentence. Why is it? (Hint: could you explain it by your knowledge from last week?)

Answer

Perhaps, you can treat comparison sentences as 'topic + comment' sentences. For example, in sentence *Wǒ māma bǐ wǒ bàba dà.* 我妈妈比我爸爸大, the 'topic' is *wǒ māma bǐ wǒ bàba* 我妈妈比我爸爸 (My mum compared with my dad), the 'comment' is *dà* 大 (older). In a 'topic + comment' sentence, the verb *shì* 是 (to be) is not present.

Part 2

Review the figures below and then come up with Chinese comparative sentences to describe what is shown. Write them down in your language notebook then check the answers afterwards.

Remember that it is not necessary to use the verb *shì* 是 (to be) when making comparisons.

Figure 1

Answer

Lǐ Dàwèi bǐ Wáng Jīng dà. 李大卫比王京大。

Li Dawei is older than Wangjing.

Figure 2

Answer

Wáng Yuè jiā de rén bǐ Lǐ Yīng jiā de rén duō. 王月家的人比李英家的人多。

There are more people in the Wang Yue family than in the Li Ying family.

Part 3

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4 Four-character idioms and expressions

Like other languages, Chinese has a lot of idiomatic expressions, many of which consist of four characters. Four-character idioms were widely used in classical Chinese and are still common in modern Chinese writing. These four-character set phrases are known as *chéng yǔ* 成语 (lit. 'set phrases').

Let's look at another comparison example with a *chéng yǔ* 成语

Wǒ māma bǐ wǒ bàba néng shuō huì dào. 我妈妈比我爸爸能说会道。

(My mum is more of a smooth talker than my dad.)

In the above sentence, *néng shuō huì dào* 能说会道 (lit. can talk, able speak) is an example of a four-character idiom.

Most of these set phrases have a moral or some kind of proverbial meaning. For example:

bá miáo zhù zhǎng 拔苗助长

lit. to help the crops grow by pulling them up (to spoil something by acting too impatiently).

Phrases used to make writing or speaking more colourful are often put together in pairs. Here is a pair often used for a New Year's card:

wàn shì rú yì ，*hé jiā huā lè!* 万事如意，合家欢乐 ！

lit. ten thousand things go as wish, whole family happy.

Why don't you research some *chéng yǔ* 成语 and put them in your language notebook!

5 Modifying comparisons

To modify a comparison, you can use qualifying phrases (known grammatically as 'complements') such as *yī diǎnr* 一点儿 (a little; a bit), *duōle* 多了 (much; a lot more) after the adjective.

'My elder sister is a lot taller than me.'

Table 4 Using *duōle* 多了

Wǒ jiějie	bǐ	wǒ	gāo	*duōle*.
我姐姐	比	我	高	多了。
lit. My elder sister	compare	I	tall	**a lot.**

Note the phrase *duōle* 多了, when it means 'much, a lot', must be placed after the adjective it modifies.

You can also make a comparison more specific by adding phrases with numbers and measurements.

'My mum is one year older than my dad.'

Table 5 Using *yī suì* .一岁

Wǒ māma	*bǐ*	*wǒ* bàba	*dà*	*yī suì* .
我妈妈	比	我爸爸	大	一岁。
lit. my mother	compare	my father	big	**one year.**

Note: when it comes to forming comparisons, you can compare the difference between Chinese and English sentence structures. Write your summary in your language notebook.

Activity 4

Part 1

Listen to the recording where you will hear a Chinese sentence and choose the most appropriate English translation for it.

> Audio content is not available in this format.

○ My elder sister is much taller than I am.

○ My elder sister is taller than I am.

○ I am taller than my elder sister.

Part 2

Translate the given sentence into Chinese and record your speech. Press the 'Start recording' button once to start, and then click again when you have finished your recording. Listen to yourself speaking and then compare it to the model answer provided in the feedback. The transcript is also available. Try to copy the sound and tones of the model speech.

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6 What would you say?

Now have a go at Activity 5.

Activity 5

Part 1

Translate the given sentences into Chinese and record your speech. Press the 'Start recording' button once to start, and then click again when you have finished your recording. Listen to yourself speaking and then compare it to the model answer provided in the feedback. The transcript is also available. Try to copy the sound and tones of the model speech.

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Part 2

Construct these English sentences in Chinese by dragging and dropping the given words into the right order.

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7 Character combination and word formation

So far this week you haven't been introduced to much new vocabulary. Activity 6 will rectify this by introducing you to some new phrases, but before working out the meaning of these, below is a list of compound words which will already be familiar to you.

> *shòu* 瘦 (thin) + *xiǎo* 小 (small) → *shòuxiǎo* 瘦小 (thin and small)
>
> *gāo* 高(tall) + *dà* 大 (big) → *gāodà* 高大 (big and tall)
>
> *duō* 多(many) + *jiǔ* 久 (long time) → *duōjiǔ* 多久 (how long)

Have you learned any other compound words recently? Perhaps you can summarise them in your language notebook.

Activity 6

hǎo piàoliang 好漂亮 ， *míngtiān jiàn* 明天见，*tài hǎole* 太好了, *hěnjiǔ* 很久

What do think these phrases mean? Take a guess and check the answers below. Feel free to use dictionaries and other tools.

Answer

hǎo piàoliang 好漂亮, very beautiful

míngtiān jiàn 明天见, see you tomorrow

tài hǎo le 太好了, wonderful

hěnjiǔ 很久, long period of time

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8 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 2 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new window or tab (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link), then return here when you have done it.

9 Practising and consolidating

To help consolidate what you have learned in this week, now have a go at Activity 7.

Activity 7

Part 1

Listen to the dialogue between Xiao Fang 小方 and Wang Yue 王月. Xiao Fang speaks first. Choose the correct option to complete the following sentences, based on the information you hear.

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Wang Yue and Xiao Fang …
○ meet for the first time.
○ know each other very well.
○ are boyfriend and girlfriend.

Xiao Fang thinks that ...
○ Wang Yue looks too thin.
○ Wang Yue has put on some weight.
○ Wang Yue has lost some weight.

Xiao Fang's girlfriend is …
○ a teacher.
○ a doctor.
○ a student.

Xiao Fang is …
○ much less busy than his girlfriend.
○ as busy as his girlfriend.
○ a lot busier than his girlfriend.

Answer

Table 6 A conversation between Xiao Fang 小方 and Wang Yue 王月

XIAO FANG:	*Wáng Yuè, hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn! Nǐ pàng le!* 王月，好久不见! 你胖了!	Wang Yue, long time no see, you have put on weight!
WANG YUE:	*Shì ma? Wǒ bù xǐhuan pàng.* 是吗? 我不喜欢胖。	Really? I don't like being overweight.
XIAO FANG:	*Tài shòu yě bù hǎo. Tài shòu bú piàoliang.* 太瘦也不好。太瘦不漂亮。	Being too thin is not good either, it's not pretty.
WANG YUE:	*Duìle, nǐ nǚpéngyou zěnme yàng?* 对了，你女朋友怎么样?	By the way, how is your girlfriend?
XIAO FANG:	*Tā hěn hǎo, xièxie.* 她很好，谢谢。	She is well, thanks.

| WANG YUE: | *Tā shì lǎoshī ba?* 她是老师吧？ | She is a teacher, right? |
| XIAO FANG: | *Shìde, tā hěn máng. Tā bǐ wǒ máng duōle.* 是的，她很忙。她比我忙多了。 | Yes, she is quite busy, she is much busier than me. |

Note: The phrase *dule* 对了 means 'by the way'.

Part 2

Interactive content is not available in this format.

10 Practising and expanding: thinking of register

In our native tongue(s) most of us instinctively adapt our speech to the circumstances in which we find ourselves; this means we are able to use a range of registers.

Register is often divided into levels: from very relaxed speech, which can include slang (and even obscenities), through informal speech, used for instance among close friends, to a level which is usually called 'standard', that is polite and neutral, inoffensive and acceptable in all social groups, and even to a higher level in very formal professional or social circumstances.

It is of course important to use the right register for the situation, so you should look out for appropriateness of usage when consulting your dictionary. An asterisk, for example, often denotes slang in an English dictionary. In a Chinese dictionary, if it is formal use, you see the sign *shū* 书, meaning 'written language'. If it is informal and colloquial, you see the sign *kǒu* 口, meaning 'spoken language'.

In Chinese, written language and spoken language are very different in terms of the use of vocabulary. There are many four-character expressions used in written language. It does not mean that you cannot use them in spoken language. However, if you use them in spoken language, your speech will sound very formal and, in some situations, it may sound a bit odd. For example, when you walk into a Chinese restaurant in China, you will be greeted with the phrase *huānyíng huānglín* 欢迎光临 by the waiter or waitress. The phrase means 'welcome your honourable presence'. If you use this expression when a friend is visiting you, you may make your friend feel uncomfortable.

11 Summary of Week 2

Now it's time to reflect on what you have learnt this week.

Activity 8

In the box below, note down what you have found easy, what was more difficult and how you plan to improve.

> *Provide your answer...*

You have now reached the end of *Getting started with Chinese 3*. You can continue your learning with LXC003 - *Beginners Chinese 3: 开始吧 kāishǐ ba!* or by visiting OpenLearn's Language and Cultures Hub where you will be able to build on your newly found language skills.

Acknowledgements

Don't miss out

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