

Question words in Chinese

Question words in Chinese are used for asking questions of what, when, where, who, how and whether. The position of *wh-* words in English. They are usually placed where the answers would be expected to appear.

In this list, besides those most frequently used question words introduced in *Discover China*, some other question words are also included with example sentences translated into English.

duō duōshao

DC1 Unit 4; DC2 Unit 5

多 / 多少 : how much, how many

Although 多少 is often translated as “how many” or “how much”, it can also be used to ask about numbers, like the telephone numbers and room numbers.

Nǐ de diànhuà hàomǎ shì duōshao

- 你的电话号码是多少？

What's your telephone number?

Zhè ge cūn zi yǒu duōshao rén jia

- 这个村子有多少人家？

How many families are there in this village?

Nà ge shíhou de jī piào hé huǒchēpiào dà gài dōu shì duō-

- 那个时候的机票和火车票大概都是多

shao qián

少钱？

How much are the flights and train tickets then?

多 means “to what extent” when used in questions. It is often used to modify words expressing measurements such as 大, 长, 宽, 高, etc. The verb 有 is optionally used in questions about size, the word expressing measurement can be used as the predicate. 有 can also be used to introduce the size followed by the word expressing measurement.

Tā dàodǐ yǒu duō gāo

- 他到底（有）多高？

Exactly, how tall is he?

Nǐ de fángjiān yǒu duō dà

- 你的房间（有）多大？

How big is your room?

Wǒ dàgài yào xiūxi duō cháng shíjiān

- 我大概要休息多长时间？

How long do I need to rest?

Nǐ de érzi duō dà le

- 你的儿子多大了？

How old is your son?

gānmá gānshénme

干吗 / 干什么 : why on earth, what for; do what

Nǐ gānmá gānshénme lǎo kànzhe wǒ

- 你干吗/干什么老看着我？

Why are you always looking at me?

Nín gānmá gānshénme lǎo shuō zhèxiē huà

- 您干吗/干什么老说这些话？

Why do you always say this?

Nǐ zài gānmá gānshénme

- 你在干吗/干什么？

What are you doing?

hǎo bù hǎo hǎoma

DC1 Unit 10

好不好 / 好吗 : is it all right ...?

好不好/好吗 is used after stating an idea or suggestion. Questions ending with 好不好/好吗 are used to ask for someone's opinion. If the respondent agrees to the suggestion, he or she may say 好/好的/好吧; but can also use “.....吧” to indicate an alternative suggestion, which is used to soften the tone of the answer.

Wǒmen yìqǐ qù hǎo bù hǎo hǎoma

- 我们一起去，好不好/好吗？

Let's go together, is that all right?

Hǎo ba

好吧。

All right.

Wǒ qù kànkan nǐ hǎo bù hǎo hǎoma

- 我去看看你，好不好/好吗？

I'll come and visit you, is that all right?

Nǐ xiān bié lái le yǐhòu zài shuō ba

你先别来了，以后再说吧。

Please don't come yet, maybe later.

Wǒmen kàn qíngkuàng zài shuō hǎo bù hǎo hǎo ma

- 我们看情况再说，好不好/好吗？

Let's see how it goes and decide later, OK?

Hǎo ba tīng nǐ de

好吧，听你的。

OK. I'll follow your idea.

háishi

DC1 Unit 10

还是: or

An alternative question is formed by linking two alternative options with the conjunction 还是. The respondent is expected to choose one or the other option.

Nǐ cóng jiā lái háishi cóng xuéxiào lái?

- 你从家来还是从学校来？

Did you come from home or school?

Wǒ cóng jiā lái

我从家来。

I came from home.

Zánmen qù Xiānggǎng háishi qù Xīnjiāpō

- 咱们去香港还是去新加坡？

Are we going to Hong Kong or Singapore?

Zánmen qù Xiānggǎng ba

咱们去香港吧。

Let's go to Hong Kong.

hé

何: what

Nǐ cóng hé ér lái?

- 你从何而来？

Where do you come from?

Nǐ shì hé rén?

- 你是谁人？

Who are you?

Nǐ zhǎo wǒ hé shì?

- 你找我何事？

Why are you looking for me?

从何: from where

为何: for what

jǐ

几: how many (number of)

Láile jǐ gè rén

- 来了几个人？

How many people have come/arrived?

Jīntiān jǐ hào

- 今天几号？

What's the date today?

Shíqī hào shì xīngqī jǐ

- 十七号是星期几？

What day is the seventeenth?

Nǐ jiā yǒu jǐ jiān wòshì

- 你家有几间卧室

How many bedrooms do you have at home?

Qǐngwèn nǐmen jǐ wèi

- 请问你们几位？

How many of you please?

jǐshí

几时: when (= 什么时候)

Nǐmen jǐshí zǒu

- 你们几时走？

When are you leaving?

Xiànzài jǐshí le

- 现在几时了？

What time is it now?

ma

DC1 Unit 2

吗

吗 is usually used at the end of a declarative sentences to form a yes/no question. The word order remains unchanged.

Nǐ shì Mǎkè ma

- 你是马克吗？

Are you Mark?

Nǐ rènshi tā ma

- 你认识他吗？

Do you know him?

nǎ

哪: which

Nín yào jiàn de shì nǎ wèi

- 您要见的是哪位?

Which one are you meeting?

Nǐ shì nǎ guó rén

- 你是哪国人?

Which country are you from?

Nǐ dàodǐ zhàn zài nǎ yì biān

- 你到底站在哪一边?

Which side are you on?

nǎge

哪个: which, which one

Nǐ shì nǎge xuéxiào de

- 你是哪个学校的?

Which school are you from?

Zhè lǐmiàn nǎge shì nǐ mèimei

- 这里面哪个是你妹妹?

Which one among these is your younger sister?

nǎhuìr

哪会儿: when (=什么时候)

Nǐ shì nǎhuìr cóng Guǎngzhōu huílai de

- 你是哪会儿从广州回来的?

When did you come back from Guangzhou?

Zhè běn shū nǎhuìr cái néng chūbǎn

- 这本书哪会儿才能出版?

When can this book be published?

nǎ nǎli nǎr

哪/哪里/哪儿: where

DC1 Unit 2

They are interrogative pronouns. They have the same position in sentences as the answers, that is to say, the word order in the question is the same as in the corresponding statement.

Nǐ zhù zài nǎli nǎr

- 你住在哪里/哪儿?

Where do you live?

Nǐ shì nǎ nǎli nǎr rén

- 你是哪/哪里/哪儿人?

Where are you from?

Nǐ māma zài nǎli nǎr gōngzuò

- 你妈妈在哪里/哪儿工作?

Where does your Mom work?

Nǐ de T xù zài nǎli nǎr mǎi de

- 你的T恤在哪里/哪儿买的?

Where did you buy your T-shirt?

Nǐ juéde nǎli nǎr bùshūfu

- 你觉得哪里/哪儿不舒服?

Whereabouts do you feel unwell?

nándào

难道: is it true that ...

The adverb 难道 is used to form a rhetorical question, which is asked without the expectation of an answer for the purpose of making a point or stressing something. 难道 can usually appear at the beginning of the rhetorical question or right before the verb.

Nándào shì wǒ cuò le

- 难道是我错了?

Am I really wrong?

Nándào wǒ bù yīnggāi xiāngxìn tā

- 难道我不应该相信他?

Shall I not trust him?

ne

DC1 Unit 1

呢

The question particle 呢 is placed after a noun or pronoun to form a follow-up question meaning "how/what about". The speaker and the listener are assumed to know what the question refers to.

Wǒ xìng Zhāng nǐ ne

- 我姓张, 你呢?

My surname is Zhang, what about yours?

Wǒ yǐjīng chīguo wǔfàn le nǐ ne

- 我已经吃过午饭了, 你呢?

I have had lunch, how about you/have you?

rúhé

如何: how

Zhè jiàn shì nǐ dǎsuan rúhé chǔlǐ

- 这件事你打算如何处理?

How are you going to handle this?

Nǐ zuìjìn rúhé

- 你最近如何?

How have you been recently?

shénme

什么 : what

Tā zài zhǎo shénme dōngxi

- 他在找什么东西?

What is he looking for?

Nǐ jiào shénme míngzi

- 你叫什么名字?

What's your name?

Xīngqīliù nǐ yǒu shénme jìhuà

- 星期六你有什么计划?

What's your plan for Saturday?

Shénme zhème xiāng

- 什么这么香?

What smells so good?

Nǐ de xīnpéngyou zhǎng shénme yàngzi

- 你的新朋友长什么样子?

What does your new friend look like?

Nín jùtǐ xiǎng zhǎo shénme shū

- 您具体想找什么书?

What books are you looking for specifically?

Nà nín juéde zài zhèlǐ shēnghuó yǒu shénme bùfāngbiàn de dìfang ma

- 那您觉得在这里生活有什么不方便的地方吗?

Is there anything you find inconvenient about living here?

Nà nǐ hái yǒu shénme hǎo yóuyù de

- 那你还有什么好犹豫的?

Then why are you still hesitating?

shì bú shì

是不是: whether or not

Nǐ shì bú shì bǎ zhè jiàn shìqing gěi wàng le

- 你是不是把这件事情给忘了?

You have forgotten this, haven't you?

Wǒ shì bú shì jìcuò le wǒmen bú shì jīntiān jiànmiàn

- 我是不是记错了, 我们不是今天见面?

Did I remember wrongly, we are not meeting today?

shéi shéi de

DC1 Unit 4

谁 / 谁的: who / whose

The interrogative pronoun 谁 can be used at the beginning of a question as the subject. It can also be used at the end of a question as the object, and sometimes equivalent to "whom" in English.

Nà wèi nǚ shì shì shéi

- 那位女士是谁?

Who is that lady?

Shéi shì Yáo Míng

- 谁是姚明?

Who is Yao Ming?

Tā shì shuí tā shì Yáo Míng shì ma

- 他是谁? 他是姚明, 是吗?

Who is he? He is Yao Ming, isn't he?

Zhè shì shéi de fángjiān

- 这是谁的房间?

Whose room is this?

wèishénme

为什么: why

Nǐ wèishénme méiyǒu cānjiā zhè cì kǎoshì

- 你为什么没有参加这次考试?

Why haven't you taken part in this examination?

Wèishénme zài Zhōngguó bùkěnéng

- 为什么在中国不可能?

Why isn't this possible in China?

Nǐ wèishénme chuān zhème duō yīfu

- 你为什么穿这么多衣服?

Why are you wearing so many clothes?

Qǐng jiěshì yíxià nǐ wèishénme rènwéi tā tā shì yīngxióng

- 请解释一下你为什么认为他/她是英雄?

Please explain why you think he/she is a hero.

yǒu méi yǒu

DC1 Unit 9

有没有: is there / are there ...? Have ... got ...?

Have ... ever ...?

没有 is the negative form of the verb 有, and we can use the phrase 有没有 in affirmative-negative questions.

Nǐ shēnshàng yǒu méi yǒu qián

- 你身上有没有钱?

Have you got any money with you?

- Fángjiān li yǒu méi yǒu rén
• 房间里有没有人?
Is there anybody in the room?

- Nǐ yǒu méi yǒu jiànguō wǒ gē ge
• 你有没有见过我哥哥?
Have you ever met my brother?

zěnme

怎么: how, what; how come

怎么 is a question word used to ask for a reason or explanation. 怎么 often appears after the subject of a sentence.

- Wǒmen zěnme qù Zuò gōnggòng qìchē hái shì zuò chūzūchē
• 我们怎么去? 坐公共汽车还是坐出租车?
How do we get there? By bus or by taxi?

- Bīngmǎyǒng shì zěnme bèi fāxiàn de
• 兵马俑是怎么被发现的?
How were the Terracotta Warriors found?

- Nǐmen shì zěnme rènshi de
• 你们是怎么认识的?
How did you get to know each other?

怎么 has a similar tone and connotation to “how come” in English. It not only asks “why”, but also expresses a tone of surprise.

- Zhè dàodǐ shì zěnme huí shì
• 这到底是怎么回事?
Why on earth is this happening?

- Nǐ zěnme bǎ māma de shēngrì gěi wàng le
• 你怎么把妈妈的生日给忘了?
How could you forget Mom's birthday?

- Nǐ zěn me bù zǎo shuō
• 你怎(么)不早说?
Why didn't you say earlier?

- Wǒ zěn me néng bùzhāojí
• 我怎(么)能不着急?
How can I not worry?

zěnme bàn

怎么办: what to do

- Wǒmen dàodǐ gāi zěnme bàn
• 我们到底该怎么办?
What on earth shall we do?

- Wǒ wàngle dài yàoshi zěnme bàn na
• 我忘了带钥匙! 怎么办哪?
I forgot my key! What shall I/we do?

zěnmeyàng zěnyàng

DC1 Unit6, Unit 9

怎么样 / 怎样: how, how about

- Zhèxiē nián nǐ guò de zěnmeyàng
• 这些年你过得怎么样?
How has life been over these years for you?

- Wǒmen qǐng tā chīfàn zěnmeyàng
• 我们请他吃饭, 怎么样?
Let's invite him for dinner, how does that sound (to you)?

- Wǒmen bā diǎn zài diànyǐngyuàn ménkǒu jiàn zěnmeyàng
• 我们八点在电影院门口见, 怎么样?
How about we meet at the entrance of the cinema?

- Chéngdū de tiānqì zěnmeyàng hé Xī'ān yíyàng lěng ma
• 成都的天气怎么样? 和西安一样冷吗?
How is the weather in Chengdu, is it as cold as in Xi'an?

- Nǐ duì Měiguó de shēnghuó gǎnjué zěnmeyàng zěnyàng
• 你对美国的生活感觉怎么样/怎样?
How do you feel about life in the US?

- Nà shì zěnmeyàng zěnyàng de yì piān xiǎoshuō
• 那是怎么样/怎样的一篇小说?
What kind of novel is that?

- Nǐmen de huàjù pái de zěnmeyàng zěnyàng le
• 你们的话剧排得怎么样/怎样了?
How was your drama rehearsal?

zěnmeyàng

怎么着: how about, what about

- Wǒmen dōu juéding cānjiā le nǐ dǎsuan zěnmeyàng
• 我们都决定参加了, 你打算怎么着?
We have all decided to take part in it, how about you?