dāai⁶ gāa¹ gě³ Gwóng² Dūng¹ Wáa²

大家嘅廣東話

Cantonese for Everyone

(Jyutping version)

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MP3

2. Cantonese Sound System

In this course, both Chinese script and alphabetic characters have been used to represent the syllables of Cantonese. The phonetic transcription in alphabetic characters (commonly referred to as romanization) provides an important tool for new learners to acquire the sounds and tones of Cantonese, even though it is not generally used by native Cantonese speakers (who simply use the Chinese characters itself to represent the language).

For the romanization, this course has adopted the "Linguistic Society of Hong Kong (LSHK) Cantonese Romanization Scheme", or known as "Jyutping®" to transcribe Cantonese sounds into alphanumeric characters, with certain modifications. The Chinese traditional characters included in the course are mainly for readers of Chinese and native Cantonese speakers; they demonstrate pronunciation to aid new learners.

Three important elements in the Cantonese syllable:

The basic characteristic of Cantonese pronunciation is that for each Chinese character there is a single syllable associated with it. The syllable in Cantonese language consists of three basic elements: initials, finals and tones.

1. **Initial:** The sound of consonant at the beginning of a syllable. There are 19 initials in all.
2. **Final:** The sound of the vowel sound plus final consonant, if any, at the end of a syllable. There are 51 common finals in all.
3. **Tone:** The relative pitch, or variation of pitch, of a syllable. There are 6 tones in all.

Note: There are two nasal consonants that can stand-alone without a vowel. These are consonants "m" & "ng", which are called Syllabic Nasals.
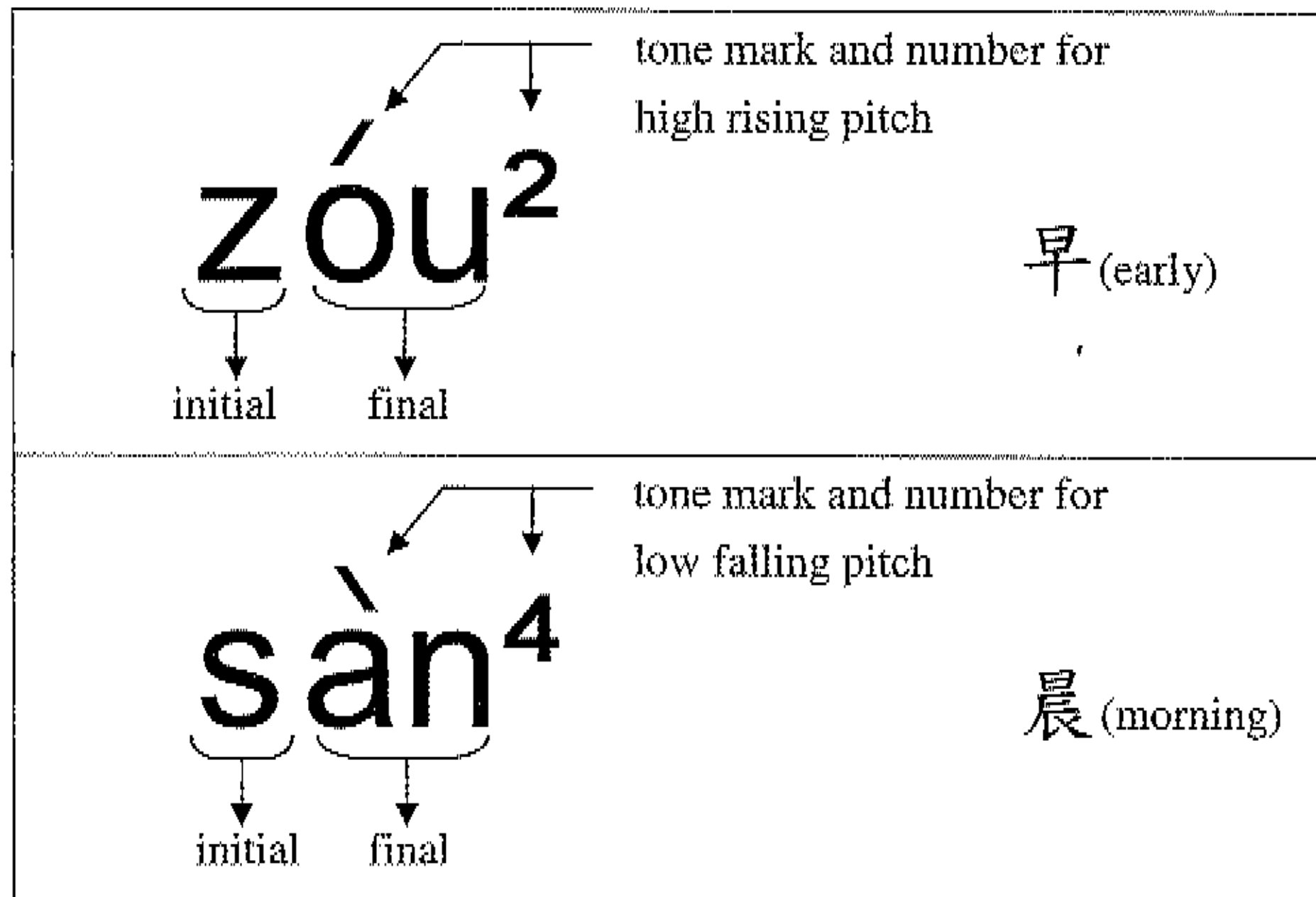
The syllables are made up of various combinations of 19 initial consonant sounds (initial) and 51 common vowels and vowel-consonant groups (final). In addition, a fixed tone pattern of fixed length is superimposed onto each syllable (tone).

Note that some initials or finals can be used independently and do not need to be in combination with others (see next topic: the combination of initial and final). Note also that it is essential that the six tone patterns have to be mastered.

® Jyutping was designed and proposed by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong in 1993 in order to standardize a simple, easy-to-learn and easy-to-use Cantonese romanization scheme. (http://lshk.ctl.cityu.edu.hk/)

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sī³ sī⁴ sī⁵ sī⁶

Let's take "good morning" as an example for Cantonese syllable structure in Jyutping and diacritics devised by the author.   The following two syllables form the phrase mean "good morning" in Cantonese: ⊛ **CD -T02**

tone mark and number for high rising pitch

zóu² 早(early)

initial   final

tone mark and number for low falling pitch

sàn⁴ 晨(morning)

initial   final

The combinations of initial and final (syllables in Cantonese)

	Element	Pattern*	Example ⊛ CD -T03
1.	One central vowel	**V**	ō¹ (*diarrhea*); āa¹ (*crow*)
2.	One central vowel & one semi-vowel (Diphthong)	**V+V**	o̊i³ (*love*); ái² (*short in height*)
3.	One central vowel & final consonant	**V+C**	ām¹ (*nunnery*); ūk¹ (*house*)
4.	One initial consonant & one central vowel	**C+V**	cē¹ (*vehicle*); fů ³ (*trousers*)
5.	One initial consonant & two vowels (Diphthong)	**C+V+V**	hóu² (*good*); se̊i³ (*four*)
6.	One initial consonant, one central vowel & final consonant	**C+V+C**	jāt¹ (*one*); săp⁶ (*ten*)
7.	Nasal consonant (Syllabic nasals)	**C**	m̀⁴ (*not*); ňg⁵ (*five*)

*V = vowel; C = consonant

1. Initials ⊘ CD -T04

We shall start with the initials of Cantonese syllables. There are 19 distinctive initials and they can be divided into five groups as seen in the summary table below:

1. Non-aspirated Voiceless ⊘		2. Aspirated Voiceless ⊘		3. Voiced Nasal ⊘		4. Fricative & Continuant ⊘		5. Semi-vowel ⊘	
b [p]	(bo)	p [pʰ]	(po)	m [m]	(mo)	f [f]	(fo)		
d [t]	(daa)	t [tʰ]	(taa)	n [n]	(naa)	l [l]	(laa)		
g [k]	(gaa)	k [kʰ]	(kaa)	ng [ŋ]	(ngaa)	h [h]	(haa)		
gw [kʷ]	(gwo)	kw [kʷʰ]	(kwo)					w [w]	(wo)
z [ts]	(ze)	c [tsʰ]	(ce)			s [s]	(si)	j [j]	(ji)

Note: the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is shown in bracket [ ] for sounding reference.

Group 1: Non-aspirated Voiceless ⊘ CD -T05

There is no puff of air associated with the non-aspirated sound. In English these non-aspirated consonants are normally found in the middle of words and are produced in a non-aspirated manner. Note that in Cantonese the consonants "b", "d", "g", "gw" and "z" are *voiceless* – that is the vocal chords *do not vibrate* in producing these consonants.

	Jyutping	IPA	Pronounced similarly as in the English word	Cantonese example ⊘	Meaning in Cantonese
1)	b	[p]	s*p*y	bēng⁶ 病	*sick*
2)	d	[t]	s*t*y	dāai⁶ 大	*big*
3)	g	[k]	s*k*y	gūi⁶ 攰	*tired*
4)	gw	[kʷ]	s*qu*ad	gwåi³ 貴	*expensive*
5)	z	[ts]	bi*ds* (very similar but voiceless)	zóu² 早	*early*

Group 2: Aspirated Voiceless ☺ CD -T06

This group is all aspirated. This means that the production of the sound is very similar to Group 1 but there is a puff of air released after the sound. It is said that the aspiration in Cantonese is generally stronger than in that of English.

	Jyutping	IPA	Pronounced similarly as in the English word	Cantonese example ☺	Meaning in Cantonese
1)	p	$[p^h]$	_p_an	pèng⁴ 平	cheap
2)	t	$[t^h]$	_t_an	túng³ 痛	painful
3)	k	$[k^h]$	_k_it	kǎn⁵ 近	near, close
4)	kw	$[k^{wh}]$	_qu_iet	kwāi¹ 虧	deficient (easy to get sick)
5)	c	$[ts^h]$	bi_ts_	cì⁴ 遲	late

Group 3: Voiced Nasals ☺ CD -T07

This group of nasals is similar to those found in English and other languages and therefore should be easy to reproduce. The only exception may be "ng" as an initial. To pronounce the initial "ng", make sure that the back of the tongue is against the soft palate. It is said that the initial "ng" is similar to the "_gn_" in the English "gnaw", e.g. "ngǒ⁵ _(I; me)_ " sounds very much like "gnaw".

	Jyutping	IPA	Pronounced similarly as in the English word	Cantonese example ☺	Meaning in Cantonese
1)	m	[m]	_m_y	mūn⁶ 悶	boring
2)	n	[n]	_n_o	nàan⁴ 難	difficult
3)	ng	[ŋ]	ha_ng_; si_ng_er	ngǒ⁵ 我	I; me

Notes:
1. Some Cantonese speakers sound "l" for "n" for words with initial n, e.g. "něi⁵ (you)" is pronounced as "lěi⁵ ". Generally speaking, both pronunciations are understood by people.
2. Some Cantonese speakers do not have "ng" as initial sound. Missing "ng" as initial sound in the pronunciation is considered as "lazy sounding", e.g. "ngǒ⁵ (I; me)" is pronounced as " ǒ⁵ " instead of "ngǒ⁵ ".
3. The above mis-sounding should not be encouraged. It would become harder for these people to learn other languages if they had less sounding repertoire in their native language. Unfortunately, many Hong Kong native speakers are found to have these "lazy sound" problem.

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sǐ³ sì⁴ sǐ⁵ sī⁶

Group 4: Fricative and Continuants ☺ CD -T08

Fricatives are consonants produced by forcing air through a narrow channel made by placing two articulators close together (Wikipedia 2007). A continuant is a sound produced with an incomplete closure of the vocal tract (Crystal 1991). The following initials are very likely to be similar to sounds in your own language. If these sounds do not appear in your language, make sure you pay special attention to their pronunciation here.

	Jyutping	*IPA*	*Pronounced similarly as in the English word*	*Cantonese example* ☺	*Meaning in Cantonese*
1)	f	[f]	*f*or	f̊aai³ 快	*fast*
2)	l	[l]	*l*ine	l̊eng³ 靚	*beautiful*
3)	h	[h]	*h*all	h̊ou² 好	*good*
4)	s	[s]	*s*ee	s̊ai³ 細	*small*

Group 5: Semi-vowels as supplementary initials ☺ CD -T09

This final group of initials is again likely to be very similar to sounds in English. Listen to them carefully to see if there are any slight differences.

	Jyutping	*IPA*	*Pronounced similarly as in the English word*	*Cantonese example* ☺	*Meaning in Cantonese*
1)	j	[j]	*y*es	j̄i⁶ 易	*easy*
2)	w	[w]	*w*est	w̄aai⁶ 壞	*bad*

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sî³ sî⁴ sĭ⁵ sī⁶

2. Finals

This is the term commonly used to describe the remaining part of the Cantonese syllable after the initial. It comprises of a central vowel combined with an optional semi-vowel or consonant at the end of the syllable. There are nine main transcriptions for the central vowel sounds, namely "aa, a~, e, i, o, u, oe, eo~" and "yu". It is important to note that quite a number of vowels have a long and short version and it is essential that learners can not only distinguish them but also practice and master the six special short vowels indicated with a ">" separately. Please refer to the Table of 51 Common Finals below for reference.

Table of 51 Common Finals

	long	short	long	short	long	short	long	short	long	short	long	short	long
Central vowel / **Final endings**	aa [aː]	(a~) [ɐ]	e [ɛː]		i [iː]		o [ɔː]		u [uː]		oe [œː]	(eo~)	yu [yː]
~i [j]	aai [aːi]	ai [ɐi]		>ei [ei]			oi [ɔːi]		ui [uːi]			eoi [øy]	
~u [w]	aau [aːu]	au [ɐu]			iu [iːu]			>ou [ou]					
~m [m]	aam [aːm]	am [ɐm]			im [iːm]								
~n [n]	aan [aːn]	an [ɐn]			in [iːn]		on [ɔːn]		un [uːn]			eon [øn]	yun [yːn]
~ng [ŋ]	aang [aːŋ]	ang [ɐŋ]	eng [ɛːŋ]			>ing [ɪŋ]	ong [ɔːŋ]			>ung [ʊŋ]	oeng [œːŋ]		
~p [p]	aap [aːpˀ]	ap [ɐpˀ]			ip [iːpˀ]								
~t [t]	aat [aːtˀ]	at [ɐtˀ]			it [iːtˀ]		ot [ɔːtˀ]		ut [uːtˀ]			eot [øtˀ]	yut [ytˀ]
~k [k]	aak [aːkˀ]	ak [ɐkˀ]	ek [ɛːkˀ]			>ik [ɪkˀ]	ok [ɔːkˀ]			>uk [ʊkˀ]	oek [œːkˀ]		

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sī̀³ sī̄⁴ sí̀⁵ sī̠⁶

The 51 finals can be divided into four groups as follows:

Group 1:   Nine main vowels ⊘CD -T10

Cantonese vowels have been noted for the emphatic movement of the lips and facial muscles and may need extra practice to properly imitate the sounds accurately.   You may wish to slightly exaggerate your imitation of the vowels in the following vowel drills.   Note that "a~" and "eo~" are always followed by a semi-vowel or consonant, while "u" and "yu" always begin with "w~" and "j~" respectively when there is no other initials appears.

	Jyutping	*IPA*	*Pronounced similarly as in the English word*	*Cantonese example* ⊘	*Meaning in Cantonese*
1)	**aa**	[aː]	*f**a**ther*	fāa¹ 花 sāan¹ 山	*flower* *mountain*
2)	**a~**	[ɐ]	*b**ut***	sān¹ 新	*new*
3)	**e**	[ɛː]	*ch**e**rry*	cē¹ 車	*a car*
4)	**i**	[iː]	*s**ee***	cī¹ 黐	*sticky*
5)	**o**	[ɔː]	*l**aw***	dō¹ 多	*a lot; many*
6)	**u**	[uː]	*m**oo**d*	fú³ 褲	*trousers*
7)	**oe***	[œː]	*h**er** (French: n**eu**f)*	hōe¹ 靴	*boot*
8)	**eo~***	[ɵ]	*(French: **œ**il)*	zéoi² 嘴	*mouth, beak*
9)	**yu***	[yː]	*(French: dess**us**)*	sȳu¹ 書	*book*

* "oe","eo~" and "yu" are considered as independent vowels (not diphthongs) pronounced as [œː], [ɵ] and [yː] with rounded lips (known as labialization).

Group 2: Ten diphthongs ⊘ CD -T11

Diphthongs are sounds consisting of a combination of two vowels. They are commonly found in many other languages. The ten diphthongs in Cantonese are made up of a central vowel sound as the first element and a semi-vowel either an "i" or a "u" at the end:

| Central vowel   +   i   (semi-vowel) |
| Central vowel   +   u   (semi-vowel) |

Please note that "aai" has a long "aa" and a weak "i", while "ai" has a short "a" and a strong "i". When you are first learning to *separate* these two diphthongs, the shorter "ai" should be pronounced with a tendency to close the mouth, while the longer "aai" should be pronounced with the mouth open for longer. I would advise to exaggerate these two diphthongs when learning so as to make a clearer distinction. Please also pay careful attention to the indicated finals with short vowels "➤".

	Jyutping	IPA	Pronounced similarly as in the English word	Cantonese example ⊘	Meaning in Cantonese
1)	aai	[aːi]	*ai*sle	fåai³ 快	*fast*
2)	ai	[ɐi]	f*i*ght	såi³ 細	*small*
3)	➤ ei	[ei]	d*ay*	něi⁵ 你	*you*
4)	oi	[ɔːi]	b*oy*	ŏi³ 愛	*love*
5)	ui	[uːi]	r*ui*n	gūi⁶ 边	*tired*
6)	➤ eoi	[ɵy]	(French: d*eui*l)	kěoi⁵ 佢	*he, she, him, her*
7)	aau	[aːu]	n*ow*	māau¹ 貓	*cat*
8)	au	[ɐu]	sh*ou*t	gáu² 狗	*dog*
9)	iu	[iːu]	f*ew*	síu² 少	*few; a little*
10)	➤ ou	[ou]	g*o*	hóu² 好	*good*

Group 3: Seventeen finals ending in nasal consonant ⊘ CD -T12

The following nasal endings are commonly found in English and other languages, but for Mandarin speakers they may have difficulty with the "m" ending sound since this sound does not exist in their native language. The more important distinction within this group is between the final "n" and the similar sounding "ng". Note also that some native Cantonese speakers may also wrongly pronounce the final "~ng" as "~n". Again, some exaggeration of pronouncing at the beginning of the learning stage will aid your mastering of these sounds.

Central vowel	+	m
Central vowel	+	n
Central vowel	+	ng

	Jyutping	IPA	Pronounced similarly as in the English word	Cantonese example ⊘	Meaning in Cantonese
1)	aam	[aːm]	_arm_	sāam¹ 三	_three_
2)	am	[ɐm]	_sum_	sām¹ 心	_heart_
3)	im	[iːm]	_seem_	dím² 點	_how; o'clock_
4)	aan	[aːn]	_aunt_	dāan¹ 單	_a bill; singular_
5)	an	[ɐn]	_sun_	sān¹ 新	_new_
6)	in	[iːn]	_seen_	gin³ 見	_meet; see_
7)	on	[ɔːn]	_lawn_	gōn¹ 乾	_dry_
8)	un	[uːn]	_soon_	wún² 碗	_a bowl_
9)	➢ eon	[ɵn]	_London_	sëon³ 信	_a letter_
10)	yun	[yːn]	(French: _une_)	sȳun¹ 酸	_sour_
11)	aang	[aːŋ]	no equivalent ("aan" + "ng")	sāang¹ 生	_raw, uncooked_
12)	ang	[ɐŋ]	_rung_	dáng² 等	_to wait for_
13)	eng	[ɛːŋ]	_length_	lëng³ 靚	_beautiful_
14)	➢ ing	[ɪŋ]	_sing_	sing³ 姓	_surname_
15)	ong	[ɔːŋ]	_long_	góng² 港	_harbour_
16)	➢ ung	[ʊŋ]	(German: acht_ung_)	dǔng³ 凍	_cold_
17)	oeng	[œːŋ]	no equivalent (somewhat like "_learning_")	hōeng¹ 香	_fragrant_

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Group 4: Seventeen finals with unreleased stops "p, t, k" ☺ CD -T13

This is an essential final sounding group that many learners of Cantonese find it difficult to pronounce and it is worth spending some time here to master these distinctive ending sounds.   Many Cantonese syllables include the consonants "p" "t" or "k" at the end but they are different from many other languages in that they are unreleased, so there is no puff of air at the end of the syllable.   This sometimes leads to the three different final consonants sounding similar if pronounced incorrectly so make sure you thoroughly practice these three ending sounds.

Central vowel	+	p	
Central vowel	+	t	
Central vowel	+	k	

	Jyutping	IPA	Pronounced similarly as in the English word but non-aspirated at the end	Cantonese example ☺	Meaning in Cantonese
1)	aap	[aːp˺]	sha**rp**er	dǎap³ 搭	to ride
2)	ap	[ɐp˺]	su**pp**er	sãp⁶ 十	ten
3)	ip	[iːp˺]	dee**p**er	díp² 碟	a plate
4)	aat	[aːt˺]	sta**rt**er	bǎat³ 八	eight
5)	at	[ɐt˺]	bu**tt**er	cāt¹ 七	seven
6)	it	[iːt˺]	ea**t**er	jĩt⁶ 熱	hot
7)	ot	[ɔːt˺]	so**rt**er	hǒt³ 渴	thirsty
8)	ut	[uːt˺]	foo**t**er	fǔt³ 濶	wide
9)	➢ eot	[ɵt˺]	no equivalent (p**u**t (but short))	cēot¹ 出	to go out
10)	yut	[yːt˺]	(French: ch**ute**)	jÿut⁶ 月	moon; month
11)	aak	[aːk˺]	ma**rk**er	bǎak³ 百	hundred
12)	ak	[ɐk˺]	tru**ck**er	dāk¹ 得	alright
13)	ek	[ɛːk˺]	che**ck**er	lēk¹ 叻	smart; capable
14)	➢ ik	[ɪk˺]	thi**ck**er	sĩk¹ 識	to know
15)	ok	[ɔːk˺]	lo**ck**er	lǒk⁶ 落	to descend
16)	➢ uk	[ʊk˺]	coo**k**er	lũk⁶ 六	six
17)	oek	[œːk˺]	**jerk**	gǒek³ 腳	a leg; foot

Note that the ~p, ~t, ~k group of finals are, in fact, similar to the previous corresponding ~m, ~n, ~ng group of finals because the tongue and lips are in the same positions for these final sounds, i.e. the lips for "m" & "p" in "sām¹ 心(heart)" and "sāp¹ 濕(wet)", the tongue tip for "n" & "t" in "jān¹ 因(reason)" and "jāt¹ 一(one)", and the back of tongue for "ng" & "k" in "lūng¹ 窿(hole)" and "lūk¹ 轆(wheel)", are same.

"~p": for example "sāp⁶ 十(ten)", you need to close the lips to make the "p" sound, but do not open them again that can cause a puff of air to be released.

"~t": for example "jāt¹ 一(one)", make sure you form a regular "t" sound (which you do normally just above the upper teeth) and do not produce a puff of air after stopping the air stream.

"~k": for example "lūk⁶ 六(six)", again just form a "k" consonant in the normal way but remember not to aspirate the ending.

3. Syllabic consonants "m" and "ng" ⊘ CD -T14

In Cantonese, the sounds "m" and "ng" can form a syllable of their own.

	Jyutping	IPA	Pronounced similarly as in the English word	Cantonese example ⊘	Meaning in Cantonese
1)	m	[m̩]	sounds just like "mmh"	m̀⁴ 唔	no; not
2)	ng	[ŋ̍]	ha**ng**	nǧ⁵ 五	five

The syllabic consonant "m" is always used in the lowest tone (low falling tone) indicating the negation of verbs or adjectives. The tone mark is marked above the "m". And "ng" is always used in low tones such as "nǧ⁴ 吳(a Chinese surname)", "nǧ⁵ 五(five)" and "nǧ⁶ 誤(mistaken)". The tone mark is marked above the "g".

Note: The "ng" syllabic is often mispronounced as "m" by Hong Kong native speakers.

4. Six Tones

The characteristic that distinguishes Cantonese from most Western languages is that it is tonal.   Cantonese is a tonal language – each syllable has a specific tone associated with it.   A tone is a distinctive relative pitch, high, middle or low, or a distinctive pitch contour, rising or falling in the range of one's voice.   There are six different tones in Cantonese.   The syllabic tone in Cantonese is an essential element of the language because the meaning of the word can change with a different tone.   Here is an example of this feature with the syllable "si" shown here with different tones and meanings.   Note the difference in meaning from the change in tone.

Tone	Pitch		Example ☺ CD -T15
1	High level tone	$\text{s}\bar{\text{i}}^1$	絲 *silk;* 詩 *poem;* 屍 *corpse;* 師 *master*
2	High rising tone	$\text{s}\acute{\text{i}}^2$	屎 *feces;* 史 *history*
3	Mid level tone	$\text{s}\mathring{\text{i}}^3$	試 *try;* 弒 *kill*
4	Low falling tone	$\text{s}\grave{\text{i}}^4$	匙 *key;* 時 *time*
5	Low rising tone	$\text{s}\breve{\text{i}}^5$	市 *city; market*
6	Low level tone	$\text{s}\bar{\text{i}}^6$	事 *matter;* 視 *vision*

As you can see, if you use the wrong tone, you are probably saying a completely different word.   It will seem odd at first that in order to speak the language correctly you have to maintain, raise or lower the relative pitch of your voice to produce the correct tone (it's a bit like singing), but after a little practice and finding a comfortable tone range, you will discover it to become progressively easier to do.

● Tone Numbers (for ordering of the same sound in a dictionary and typing with keyboard):
Like in most Cantonese dictionary or other romanization systems, **Jyutping** also uses numeral numbers 1 – 6 to indicate from high to low tones. It is recommended that you remember the traditional tone order, and therefore be able to use 1 – 6 to indicate Cantonese tone in typing or in consulting a Cantonese dictionary.   In Unit 1, 2 and the Glossaries the tone numbers 1 – 6 will be written in superscript in order to make the tone marks clearly recognizable.

● Tone Mnemonics (diacritics and hand signals for teaching and learning):
In order to remind you of the different tones, the author has designed a hand signal system to represent each of the six tones.   As an iconic notation of tones, instead of the tone numbers 1 – 6, diacritics (tone marks) are used in the main text as a visual impression (image) on the top of the first vowel or on the tope of the letter of the syllabic nasals, to help you remind yourself of the tone for each Cantonese syllable.   You may always convert the tone marks into tone numbers according to the Key for Tones at the bottom of each page when you need to.

Key for tones:
$\text{s}\bar{\text{i}}^1$ $\text{s}\acute{\text{i}}^2$ $\text{s}\mathring{\text{i}}^3$ $\text{s}\grave{\text{i}}^4$ $\text{s}\breve{\text{i}}^5$ $\text{s}\bar{\text{i}}^6$

The following is an example of this modified system with the sketch illustrating the relative pitch curve of the six tones and the Cantonese syllable "si" in all six tones with diacritics and hand signals. ⊘ CD -T15

	1. high level	2. high rising	3. mid level	4. low falling	5. low rising	6. low level
Jyutping. e.g ⊘	si¹	si²	si³	si⁴	si⁵	si⁶
Tone no. & Mnemonics	1 ☞ –	2 ☞ ′	3 ☞ ∘	4 ☞ `	5 ☞ ˇ	6 ☞ ‐
Diacritics	sī	sí	sı̇	sì	sı̌	sī

Note: The keyboard-like column on above left gives learners an idea about the range of relative pitch in Cantonese.

Let us describe each of the tones, its hand signals and how its diacritics and tone numbers are written in the following:

The 1st tone is the **high level tone**. If you start your voice high-pitched and let it stays more or less at the same high pitch throughout, that's the high level tone. Hold your left fist and stretch your index finger then keep it in the horizontal level (☞). It is marked with a macron (–) above the first vowel or the number "1" at the end of the syllable, e.g. sī¹絲(silk), fān¹分(minute).

The 2nd tone is the **high rising tone**. It starts at a fairly low pitch and normally rises above the pitch of the 1st tone. Hold your left fist and stretch your index finger then keep it up in 45 degree (☞). It is marked with an acute accent (′) above the first vowel or the number "2" at the end of the syllable, e.g. sí²屎(feces), fán²粉(powder).

The 3rd tone is the **mid level tone**. It is a steady pitch around the middle tone of a person's voice and is considered as a comfortable tone of one's voice. Just hold you left fist and no need to use any finger (☞). It is marked with a small circle (∘) above the first vowel or the number "3" at the end of the syllable, e.g. sı̇³試(try), fı̇n³瞓(sleep).

The **4**[th] tone is the **low falling tone**. This is the lowest tone among the six tones in Cantonese. It starts from lower than the medium pitch and falls to a fairly low pitch. Hold your left thumb up indicating the lower tone and show your little finger down representing the falling pitch ( ). It is marked with a grave accent (ˋ) above the first vowel or the number "4" at the end of the syllable, e.g. sì⁴匙(key), fàn⁴墳(tomb).

The **5**[th] tone is the **low rising tone**. It starts almost in the same pitch as the 2nd tone but only rises to about the mid level tone. Also hold your left thumb up indicating the lower tone and stretch your index finger then keep it up in 45 degree showing it is a rising pitch ( ). It is marked with a hacek (ˇ) above the first vowel or the number "5" at the end of the syllable, e.g. sǐ⁵市(city), fǎn⁵奮(work vigorously).

The **6**[th] tone is a **low level tone**. It stays at a constant low pitch for its duration of the syllable. Also hold your left thumb up indicating the lower tone and stretch the other four fingers out in the horizontal level. It shows a letter "L" reminding you that it is a low level tone ( ). It is marked with a flattened capital letter "L" (˗) above the first vowel or the number "6" at the end of the syllable, e.g. sī̄⁶事(matter), fān⁶份(portion).

Note that in the Syllabic Nasals "m" and "ng", which has no vowel letters, the tone mark is written above the "m" and "g", e.g. m̀⁴唔(not) and ńǧ⁵五(five).

Here are the numerals 0-10 in six tones for you to practice: ☺ CD -T16

Zero	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
lìng⁴	jāt¹	jī⁶	sāam¹	sêi³	ńǧ⁵	lŭk⁶	cāt¹	båat³	gáu²	sāp⁶

Remember these six numbers in order to help you get used to the six tones: ☺ CD -T16

high level	high rising	mid level	low falling	low rising	low level
3	9	4	0	5	2
sāam¹	**gáu²**	**sêi³**	**lìng⁴**	**ńǧ⁵**	**jī⁶**

The sounds of high and low tones depend on individuals and will be different from people to people with higher or lower pitched voices. If the high tone is too high it will not only sound silly but also uncomfortable to say. The low falling tone is quite distinctive in how low it is. If it is too low it will be difficult to reproduce and if not low enough it cannot be easily distinguished by Cantonese speakers. Therefore it is important to first find your own highest tone (the 1st tone) and lowest tone (the 4th tone), e.g. sāam¹ 三 (three) – lìng⁴ 零 (zero), fūn¹ jìng⁴ 歡迎(welcome), cīu¹ jàn⁴ 超人 (superman). Starting from the 1st tone, establish the 2nd and 3rd tones, e.g. sāam¹ 三 (three) – gáu² 九 (nine) – sẻi³ 四 (four), cī¹ zó² sỉn³ 黐 咗 綫(got crazy). After that, work on the 5th and 6th tones beginning with your 4th tone, e.g. lìng⁴ 零 (zero) – nğ⁵ 五 (five) – jī⁶ 二 (two), làu⁴ ngǎan⁵ lēoi⁶ 流 眼 淚 (tears fall from eyes). Establishing and being aware of your tones is a crucial part of the Cantonese language learning so make sure you are able to distinguish and reproduce all six tones well.

Now let's try to practice the following six tones one after another: ⊘ CD -T17

	1. high level	2. high rising	3. mid level	4. low falling	5. low rising	6. low level
1)	fū¹	fú²	fů³	fù⁴	fŭ⁵	fū⁶
2)	bāai¹	báai²	bảai³	bàai⁴	bǎai⁵	bāai⁶
3)	sām¹	sám²	sảm³	sàm⁴	sǎm⁵	sām⁶
4)	dāng¹	dáng²	dảng³	dàng⁴	dǎng⁵	dāng⁶
5)	lūk¹	lúk²	lůk³	lùk⁴	lŭk⁵	lūk⁶
6)	sāam¹ 衫	móu² 帽	fů³ 褲	hàai⁴ 鞋	jŷu⁵ 與	māt⁶ 襪
	(clothes, hats, trousers, shoes and socks)					
7)	sāam¹ 三	dím² 點	bůn³ 半	lèi⁴ 嚟	ngǒ⁵ 我	dōu⁶ 度
	(Come to my place at half-past three.)					
8)	fūn¹ 歡	héi² 喜	dỏu³ 到	làu⁴ 流	ngǎan⁵ 眼	lēoi⁶ 淚
	(I am so happy that tears fall from my eyes.)					
9)	jāt¹ 一	wún² 碗	sải³ 細	ngàu⁴ 牛	nǎam⁵ 腩	mīn⁶ 麵
	(One small bowl of noodles with beef brisket.)					
10)	cīng¹ 清	có² 楚	sảai³ 晒	m̀⁴ 唔	wŭi⁵ 會	màn⁶ 問
	(It is so clear, nobody would ask.)					

20

3. Immediately Useful Expressions

Here are some very useful expressions for you to try out and this section will also let you get used to the **Jyutping**.   As a beginner, all you need to know is that each character will have a monosyllabic sound and tone.   You will need to get a native Cantonese speaker to say them aloud or listen to the recording and mimic them properly.

1. Basic greetings ☺CD -T18

	Cantonese	English Equivalent
1.	něi⁵ hóu². *(slightly formal)* 你/　好/　。 you/　good/	*Good day.* *Hello!*
2.	něi⁵ hóu². *(1ˢᵗ time meeting)* 你/　好/　。 you/　good/	*How do you do!*
3.	*Q:* něi⁵ hóu² måa³? 你/　好/　嗎/ ? you/　good/　PT/	*How are you?*
4.	*A₁:* géi² hóu². jǎu⁵ sām¹. 幾/　好/ ，　有/　心/　。 quite/　good/　have/　heart/	*Quite good, thanks for asking.*
5.	*A₂:* hóu² hóu². 好/　好/　。 very/　good/	*(I'm) fine.*
6.	*A₃:* màa⁴ máa² déi². 麻　麻　哋/　。 so-so/	*Just so-so.*
7.	*A₄:* m̀⁴ hāi⁶ géi² hóu². 唔/　係/　幾/　好/　。 not/　be/　quite/　good/	*Not so good.*
8.	*A₅:* m̀⁴ hóu². 唔/　好/　。 not/　good/	*Not good.*
9.	wåi³! *(between closer acquaintances)* 喂/ ! hey/	=*Hi!* =*Hey!*
10.	hāa¹ lóu²! *(informal)* 哈　佬/! [sound transcription from English]	=*Hello!*

2. Everyday greetings ⊘CD-T19

	Cantonese	English Equivalent
Morning	zóu² sàn⁴. 早/ 晨/。 early/ morning/	=*Good morning.*
Night	zóu² táu². 早/ 抖/。 early/ rest/	=*Good night.* =*Sleep well.*

3. Greetings around mealtimes ⊘CD-T19

	Cantonese	English Equivalent
Afternoon *(around* *mealtimes)*	*Q:* sīk⁶ zó² fāan⁶ mēi⁶ åa³? 食/ 咗/ 飯/ 未/ 呀/? eat/ done/ rice/ yet/ PT/	=*Have you eaten yet?* =*(How's it going?)*
	A₁: sīk⁶ zó² låa³. 食/ 咗/ 喇/。 eat/ done/ PT/	=*Yes, I've eaten.*
	A₂: mēi⁶ åa³. 未/ 呀/ 。 not yet/ PT/	=*No, not yet.*
Evening *(around* *mealtimes)*	*Q:* sīk⁶ zó² fāan⁶ mēi⁶ åa³? 食/ 咗/ 飯/ 未/ 呀/? eat/ done/ rice/ yet/ PT/	=*Have you eaten yet?* =*(How's it going?)*

4. Saying goodbye ⊘CD-T20

	Cantonese	English Equivalent
Leaving	zòi³ gin³. *(slightly formal)* 再/ 見/。 again/ see/	=*Goodbye.* =*Until next time, goodbye.* =*See you!*
	bāai¹ båai³. 拜 拜/。 [*sound transcription from English*]	=*Bye-bye.*
	tīng¹ jåt⁶ gin³. 聽 日/ 見/。 tomorrow/ see/	*See you tomorrow.*
	jāt¹ zān⁶ gin³. 一 陣/ 見/。 one moment/ see/	*See you in a moment.* *See you in a while.* *See you later.*
	māan⁶ máan² hàang⁴. 慢 慢/ 行/。 slowly/ walk/	*Mind your step.* *Take care!* *Mind how you go!*

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sī̀³ sī̌⁴ sī́⁵ sī̄⁶

5. Useful expressions ◎CD -T21

	Cantonese	English Equivalent
1.	fūn¹ jìng⁴! 歡/ 迎/! happy/ receive/	Welcome!
2.	m̀⁴ gōi¹. 唔/ 該/ 。 not/ ought to/	Thank you (for a service). Excuse me, …(attracting attention, esp. when asking somebody for assistance, etc.) Please…(to make a request more politely)
3.	dō¹ zē̆⁶. 多/ 謝/ 。 many/ thanks/	Thank you. (for a gift, invitation or a compliment, etc.)
4.	m̀⁴ sái² håak³ hĕi³. 唔/ 使/ 客 氣/ 。 no/ need/ polite/	You're welcome. Don't mention it. Please don't bother. Please make yourself at home.
5.	dĕoi³ m̀⁴ zȳu⁶. 對 唔 住/ 。 sorry/	(I'm) sorry! (quite serious) Excuse me!
6.	m̀⁴ hóu² jí³ sī̄¹. 唔/ 好/ 意 思/ 。 not/ good/ meaning/	Sorry! (not so serious) It's embarrassing. (also pronounced as "m̀⁴ hóu² jí³ sĭ³")
7.	m̀⁴ gán² jiu³. 唔/ 緊 要/ 。 not/ important/	Never mind. It's all right. Forget it. Don't worry.
8.	mŏu⁵ măn⁶ tài⁴. 冇/ 問 題/ 。 have not/ problem/	No problem.
9.	màai⁴ dāan¹! 埋/ 單/! sum-up/ bill/	The bill! The check!
10.	jău⁵ lŏk⁶! 有/ 落/! have/ descend/	I want to get off (from a vehicle). (As used in public light buses - minibuses)
11.	nī̄¹ dōu⁶ tìng⁴ (cē̄¹). 呢 度/ 停/ （車）。 here/ stop/ car/	Stop (the car) here!

	Cantonese	English Equivalent
12.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ dáng² dáng². 唔 該/ 等 等/ 。 please/ wait a little/	Please wait (a moment). (also "m̀⁴ gōi¹ dáng² jāt¹ zǎn⁶")
13.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ ze̊³ ze̊³. 唔 該/ 借 借/ 。 please/ lend a little/	Please let me go through. Excuse me. (I want to get through.)
14.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ fåai³ dī¹. 唔 該/ 快/ 啲/ 。 please/ fast/ ~er/	Faster, please. Be quick, please.
15.	mǎi⁵ jūk¹, béi² cín² ngǒ⁵! 咪/ 郁/ ， 俾/ 錢/ 我 ！ don't/ move/, give/ money/ me/	Freeze (Don't move)! Give me the money! (in a robbery)
16.	gåu³ mēng⁶ åa³! 救/ 命/ 呀/ ！ save/ life/ PT/	Help!! (asking for help in a critical situation)
17.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ dáa² gáu² gáu² gáu²! 唔 該/ 打/ 九/ 九/ 九/ ！ please/ hit/ nine/ nine/ nine/	Please dial 999! (for the police) Please call the police.
18.	ngǒ⁵ m̀⁴ zī¹. 我/ 唔/ 知/ 。 I/ not/ know/	I don't know.

6. Classroom expressions ☺ CD -T22

	Cantonese	English Equivalent
1.	něi⁵ jǎu⁵ mǒu⁵ mān⁶ tài⁴ åa³? 你/ 有/ 冇/ 問 題/ 呀/? you/ have/ have not/ question / PT/	=Do you have any questions?
2.	ngǒ⁵ jǎu⁵ mān⁶ tài⁴. 我/ 有/ 問 題/ I/ have/ question/	=I have a question.
3.	ngǒ⁵ mǒu⁵ mān⁶ tài⁴. 我/ 冇/ 問 題/ I/ have not/ question/	=I have no questions.
4.	něi⁵ mìng⁴ m̀⁴ mìng⁴ åa³? 你/ 明/ 唔/ 明/ 呀/? you/ clear/ not/ clear / PT/	=Do you understand?
5.	ngǒ⁵ m̀⁴ mìng⁴. 我/ 唔/ 明/ 。 I/ not/ clear/	=I don't understand.
6.	ngǒ⁵ mìng⁴. 我/ 明/ 。 I/ clear/	=I understand.

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sî³ sì⁴ sī⁵ sī⁶

7.	dāk¹ m̀⁴ dāk¹ åa³? 得/ 唔/ 得/ 呀/ ? okay/ not/ okay/ PT/	=*Is that okay?*
8.	dāk¹, mŏu⁵ mãn⁶ tài⁴. 得/ 冇/ 問 題/ 。 okay/ have not/ question/	=*Okay, no problem.*
9.	mēi⁶ dāk¹ åa³. 未/ 得/ 呀/ 。 not yet/ okay/ PT/	=*Not yet.*
10.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ zŏi³ góng² jāt¹ cĭ³ āa¹. 唔 該/ 再/ 講/ 一 次/ 吖/ 。 please/ again/ say/ once/ PT/	=*Please say it once more.*
11.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ góng² dãai⁶ sēng¹ dī¹. 唔 該/ 講/ 大 聲/ 啲/ 。 please/ say/ loud/ ~er/	=*Please speak louder.*
12.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ góng² mãan⁶ dī¹. 唔 該/ 講/ 慢/ 啲/ 。 please/ say/ slow/ ~er/	=*Please speak slower.*
13.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ góng² fåai³ dī¹. 唔 該/ 講/ 快/ 啲/ 。 please/ say/ fast/ ~er/	=*Please speak faster.*
14.	m̀⁴ gōi¹ gān¹ ngŏ⁵ góng². 唔 該/ 跟 / 我/ 講/ 。 please/ follow/ me/ say/	=*Please repeat after me.*
15.	jāt¹ cài⁴ góng². 一 齊/ 講/ 。 together/ say/	=*Say it together.*
16.	hóu² hóu². 好/ 好/ 。 very/ good/	=*Very good.*
17.	hãa⁶ cĭ³ zŏi³ gin³. 下/ 次/ 再/ 見/ 。 below/ time/ again/ see/	=*See you next time.*

It is particularly important to seek advice and feedback on how well you are doing at reproducing the correct tones in Cantonese. After some practice, try to find a native Cantonese to try out your newly acquired tones. If they seem to understand what you say then you are doing well. But if they do not seem to understand, then it could either be a tone problem or the inaccuracy of the pronunciation. In this case, you will need to pinpoint the problem and further practice to overcome it.

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sī³ sì⁴ sĭ⁵ sī⁶

Unit Two
Numerals

1. Cardinal Numbers

2. Ordinal Numbers

3. Traditional Signs for Numbers

4. Money

5. Date

6. Clock Time

7. Counting Things with Measure Words

Unit 2: Numerals

In order to survive in Hong Kong, knowledge of numbers, the number system and how numbers are used in Cantonese is very important. We will tackle all these aspects in the following sections.

Remember, this is also a good opportunity to practice Cantonese sounds and tones you have just learned, so try to pay attention to the accuracy of your pronunciation. Also, the following sections include some fundamental concepts that may be different from your own language, like the concept of measure words or how numbers are built up in Cantonese. Try to spend some time understanding these sections and you will find learning much easier later on in the course.

1. Cardinal Numerals (0 – 1,000,000)

1. Single digit numbers (0 – 9) ⊛ CD -T23

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
lìng⁴	jāt¹	jī̄⁶	sāam¹	sě̊i³	nğ⁵	lūk⁶	cāt¹	bå̊at³	gáu²
零	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九

Practice

My telephone number is....

For example 2659-4713:

ngǒ̊⁵ gě̊³ dīn⁶ wáa² hǎ̊i⁶ jī̄⁶, lūk⁶, nğ⁵, gáu², sě̊i³, cāt¹, jāt¹, sāam¹.

9534-2095;	2859-1010;
8971-2507;	9500-2468;

2. Building up numbers from 10 to 19 ⊛ CD -T24

sāp⁶	十	10	*Ten*
sāp⁶ jāt¹	十一	10+1	*Eleven*
sāp⁶ jī̄⁶	十二	10+2	*Twelve*
sāp⁶ sāam¹	十三	10+3	*Thirteen*
sāp⁶ sě̊i³	十四	10+4	*Fourteen*
sāp⁶ nğ⁵	十五	10+5	*Fifteen*
sāp⁶ lūk⁶	十六	10+6	*Sixteen*
sāp⁶ cāt¹	十七	10+7	*Seventeen*
sāp⁶ bå̊at³	十八	10+8	*Eighteen*
sāp⁶ gáu²	十九	10+9	*Nineteen*

Key for tones:
sī̄¹ sí² sǐ³ sì⁴ sǐ⁵ sī̄⁶

3. Building up numbers from 20 to 99

20 is "two ten", i.e. jī⁶ sāp⁶ 二十 in Cantonese, therefore 21 is "two ten one", jī⁶ sāp⁶ jāt¹ 二十一, 22 is "two ten two", jī⁶ sāp⁶ jī⁶ 二十二, 30 is "three ten", sāam¹ sāp⁶ 三十, and so on.

4. Abbreviations of "~ sāp⁶~" ⊘ CD -T25

a) The two-digit numbers are abbreviated in informal speech, especially in quoting prices. "jī⁶ sāp⁶ + *Numeral*" (*twenty* + something) are often contracted to "jāa⁶ + *Numeral*" or "jě⁶ + *Numeral*": ⊘

22	jī⁶ sāp⁶ jī⁶ ⟹ jāa⁶ jī⁶; jě⁶ jī⁶
24	jī⁶ sāp⁶ sěi³ ⟹ jāa⁶ sěi³; jě⁶ sěi³

b) "sāam¹ sāp⁶ + *Numeral*" (*thirty* + something) are often contracted to "sāa¹ āa⁶ + *Numeral*": ⊘

35	sāam¹ sāp⁶ ňg⁵ ⟹ sāa¹ āa⁶ ňg⁵
38	sāam¹ sāp⁶ bāat³ ⟹ sāa¹ āa⁶ bāat³

c) Similarly, in numbers from 40 onwards, the word "sāp⁶" (*ten*) is reduced to "āa⁶": ⊘

46	sěi³ sāp⁶ lūk⁶ ⟹ sěi³ āa⁶ lūk⁶
59	ňg⁵ sāp⁶ gáu² ⟹ ňg⁵ āa⁶ gáu²
83	bāat³ sāp⁶ sāam¹ ⟹ bāat³ āa⁶ sāam¹

5. Numerals indicating hundreds "bāak³ 百" ⊘ CD -T26

jāt¹ bāak³	1 x 100	*one hundred*
jī⁶ bāak³	2 x 100	*two hundred*
sāam¹ bāak³	3 x 100	*three hundred*
sěi³ bāak³	4 x 100	*four hundred*
ňg⁵ bāak³	5 x 100	*five hundred*
lūk⁶ bāak³	6 x 100	*six hundred*
cāt¹ bāak³	7 x 100	*seven hundred*
bāat³ bāak³	8 x 100	*eight hundred*
gáu² bāak³	9 x 100	*nine hundred*

6. **Building up numbers from 101 to 999** ⊘ CD -T27

jāt¹ båak³ lìng⁴ jāt¹	1 x 100 + 0 +1	*101*
jī⁶ båak³ jī⁶ sāp⁶ jī⁶	2 x 100 + 20 + 2	*222*
ngˇ⁵ båak³ lūk⁶ sāp⁶ cāt¹	5 x 100 + 60 + 7	*567*
cāt¹ båak³ sāam¹ sāp⁶	7 x 100 + 30	*730*
båat³ båak³ båat³ sāp⁶ båat³	8 x 100 + 80 + 8	*888*
gáu² båak³ gáu² sāp⁶ gáu²	9 x 100 + 99	*999*

7. **Counting thousands and above** ⊘ CD -T28

In Chinese, "cīn¹ 千" is used to indicate thousands and there is an additional unit "mãan⁶ 萬" to indicate ten thousand.

Here is a chart to show the Chinese counting system: ⊛

(ten thousands)

mãan⁶萬   *(thousands)*

  cīn¹千   *(hundreds)*

    båak³百   *(tens)*

      sāp⁶十   *(ones)*

        gǒ³個

9   8,   7   6   5
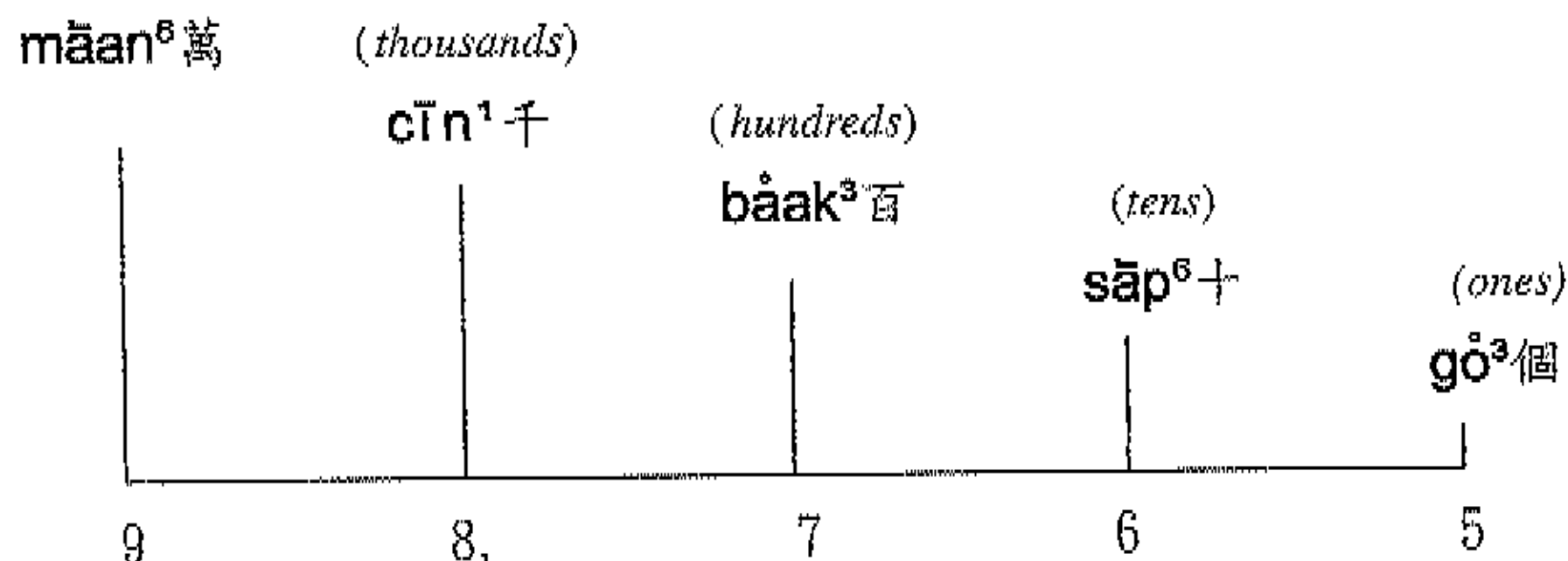
(= Ninety-eight thousand seven hundred and sixty-five)

Above "mãan⁶萬" (10,000), the Chinese system counts up to ten "mãan⁶萬" (100,000), hundred "mãan⁶ 萬" (1,000,000), and a thousand "mãan⁶ 萬" (10,000,000). The next higher count, a "mãan⁶萬" "mãan⁶萬" is denoted by a new unit "jīk¹億" (100,000,000). See chart below: ⊛

(100 millions)   *(10 millions)*

jīk¹   **cīn¹ (mãan⁶)**   *(millions)*

（億）   千（萬）   **båak³ (mãan⁶)**   *(100 thousands)*

      百（萬）   **sāp⁶ (mãan⁶)**   *(10 thousands)*

        十（萬）   **mãan⁶**

            萬

9   8   7,   6   5(0, 000)
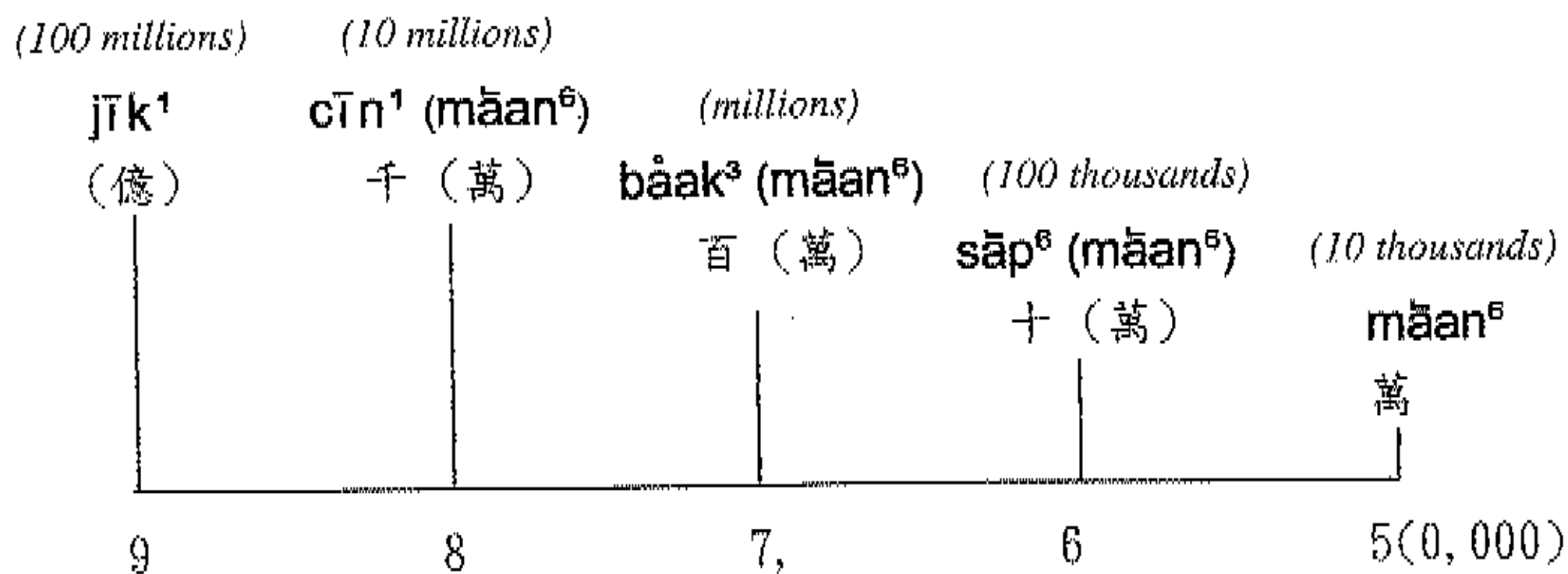
(= Nine hundred eighty- seven million and six hundred & fifty thousand)

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sǐ³ sì⁴ sí⁵ sī⁶

8. Numbers with special meaning, lucky and taboo numbers:

To the Chinese, many numbers are endowed with positive or negative (or both) connotations. Here are some numbers that rhyme with special meaning:

0	lìng⁴	nìn⁴ 年	year
1	jāt¹	jāt⁶ 日	day
2	jī⁶	jī⁶ 易	easy
3	sāam¹	sāang¹ 生	alive, born
4	sẻi³	séi² 死	die, death
5	nğ⁵	m̀⁴ 唔	not, no
6	lūk⁶	lōu⁶ 路	road, way
7	cāt¹	sāt¹ 失	to lose; to die
8	bảat³	fåat³ 發	prosper, make money
9	gáu²	còeng⁴ gáu² 長久	long lasting, long life
10	sãp⁶	sãp⁶ cỳun⁴ sãp⁶ měi⁵ 十全十美	perfect
		sàt⁶ 實	definitely; certainly

Lucky numbers for the vehicle license number plate: ⊙ CD -T29

18	sāt⁶ fåat³	sure to prosper
28	jī⁶ fåat³	easy to prosper
118	jāt⁶ jāt⁶ fåat³	make money everyday
168	jāt¹ lōu⁶ fåat³	prosper all the way
328	sāang¹ jì³ fåat³	business makes money
9888	gáu² fåat³ fåat³ fåat³	long & endless prosperity

Taboo numbers: ⊙ CD -T30

4	séi²	to die
14	sàt⁶ séi²	surely die
24	jī⁶ séi²	easy to die
164	jāt¹ lōu⁶ séi²	die all the way
5354	m̀⁴ sāam¹ m̀⁴ sẻi³	neither one thing nor the other; (not solid, bad or messy)
5354	m̀⁴ sāang¹ m̀⁴ séi²	neither dead nor alive
9394	gáau² sāam¹ gáau² sẻi³	a man having an affair; to make trouble

Choose an auspicious registration number for your car and explain why it is a good choice for you.

2. Ordinal Numbers

When a cardinal number is preceded by "dãi⁶ 第", it becomes ordinal. ☺ CD -T31

dãi⁶ 第 + *Number*

dãi⁶ jāt¹	第一	*the first*
dãi⁶ jî⁶	第二	*the second*
dãi⁶ sāam¹	第三	*the third*
dãi⁶…	第…	*(…and so on)*
dãi⁶ géi²?	第幾 ?	*what rank?*

These ordinal numbers can be placed before a measure word (MW) and noun (N) as a modifier.

dãi⁶ 第 + *Number* + *MW* + *N*

dãi⁶ jāt¹ gŏ³ (jàn⁴)	第一個(人)	*the first one (person)*
dãi⁶ jî⁶ gåa³ (cē¹)	第二架(車)	*the second one (vehicle)*
dãi⁶ sāam¹ gāan¹ (fóng²)	第三間(房)	*the third one (room)*
dãi⁶ géi² + *MW* ?	第幾+ *MW* ?	*what rank?*

Practice

Read out the following ordinal numbers in Cantonese.

e.g. 12th = dãi⁶ sãp⁶ jî⁶

3ʳᵈ _____   8ᵗʰ _____   2ⁿᵈ _____   4ᵗʰ _____

10ᵗʰ _____   1ˢᵗ _____   50ᵗʰ _____   *which rank?* _____

Listen to your teacher and write down the ordinal numbers.

e.g. ___5ᵗʰ___ (dãi⁶ nğ⁵)   _____ (_____)

_____ (_____)   _____ (_____)

_____ (_____)   _____ (_____)

These signs are usually used for showing prices in market, restaurant or sometimes minibus.

Traditional signs	○	I (一)	II (二)	III (三)	ㄨ	8	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅛ	夂	十
Chinese characters	零	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九	十
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

In written Chinese, we write the digits and the units of money as follows:

千 cīn¹	百 bǎak³	十 sǎp⁶	元 jỳun⁴	角 gǒk³ / 毫 hòu⁴	分 fān¹
thousands	*hundreds*	*tens*	*dollars*	*ten cents*	*one cent*

Writing and Reading Order: from left to right, top to bottom.

top row for numbers:	1st	3rd	5th
bottom row for digits & units:	2nd	4th	6th

E.g.

a) II 三 元 ($2.30)	b) III 一 元 ($3.10)	c) ㄨ 8 元 ($4.50)
d) 8 ㅗ 十元 ($56.00)	e) ㅛ ㄨ 十元 ($74.00)	f) 夂 8 十元 ($95.00)
g) ㅛ ○ III 百十元 ($803.00)	h) 一 夂 ㄨ 百十元 ($694.00)	i) 三 8 ○ ㅗ 千百十元 ($3,507.00)

Note that the small units of money like "ten-cent" or "one-cent" is omitted.

4. Money

The currency in Hong Kong is the HK$, which is pegged to the US$ at a fixed rate of HK$7.80=US$1. The bank notes in circulation are in the following denominations: $1,000, $500, $100, $50, $20, $10. Coins can be found in units of $10, $5, $2, $1, 50¢, 20¢ and 10¢. Several local banks have the authority to issue bank notes so there are more than one design for each denomination. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority issues the HK$10 note, while all the other notes are issued either by HSBC, Bank of China or Standard Chartered Bank. (also see p.83)

1. Dollars ☻ CD -T32

In Hong Kong currency, the basic unit of money "**cín²**錢" is "**mān¹**蚊(*dollars*)". This unit is also used as a measure word, so when you want to say an amount of money, just include "**mān¹**蚊" after the numerical value.

$$\boxed{numerical\ value\ +\ mān¹ 蚊}$$

For example: ☻

1)	jāt¹ mān¹	$1
2)	lŏeng⁵ mān¹①	$2
3)	sāp⁶ mān¹	$10
4)	sāp⁶ jī⁶ mān¹	$12
5)	jāt¹ båak³ mān¹	$100
6)	jāt¹ cīn¹ mān¹	$1,000
7)	jāt¹ mǎan⁶ mān¹	$10,000
8)	sāp⁶ mǎan⁶ mān¹	$100,000
9)	jāt¹ båak³ mǎan⁶ mān¹	$1,000,000

Practice   Read out the amounts of money given below.

For example: $350 = sāam¹ båak³ nğ⁵ sāp⁶ mān¹

$ 2,205	$ 1,489	$ 37,961	$ 75,888

---

① In Cantonese, there are two distinct words: "**jī⁶**" and "**lŏeng⁵**" meaning "two". "**jī⁶**" is used in counting and in compound numbers such as "**jī⁶ sāp⁶** (twenty)" and "**jī⁶ båak³** (two hundred)" , etc. while "**lŏeng⁵**" is used to quantify nouns such as "**lŏeng⁵ mān¹** (two dollars)" and "**lŏeng⁵ gȯ³ jàn⁴** (two persons)", etc. (also see p.46)

2. Ten-cent units ☺ CD -T33

In Hong Kong currency, a smaller unit of money than the dollar (mān¹蚊) is "hòu⁴ zí²毫子", which is a ten-cent unit (similar to the US "dime"). **One "mān¹ 蚊" is equal to ten "hòu⁴ zí² 毫子".** In colloquial speech, the shorter form "hòu⁴毫" is commonly used. This unit is also a measure word by itself.

<div style="border:1px solid">

1-9 + hòu⁴ 毫

</div>

E.g. ☺

1)	jāt¹ hòu⁴ (zí²)	*ten cents* 10¢
2)	lŏeng⁵ hòu⁴ (zí²)	*twenty cents* 20¢
3)	ňg⁵ hòu⁴ (zí²)	*fifty cents* 50¢
4)	gáu² hòu⁴ (zí²)	*ninety cents* 90¢

3. Dollars & ten-cent units ☺ CD -T34

a) Using "gò³個" instead of "mān¹蚊":

When a figure involves both dollars and ten-cent units, "gò³個" is used instead of "mān¹蚊" for dollars and "hòu⁴毫" may be omitted in speech. Also, "jī⁶ 二" is used for 2 ten-cent units and "bǔn³半 *(half)*" is used for 5 ten-cent (i.e. half dollar) units in such cases.

<div style="border:1px solid">

figure of dollars + gò³個 + *figure of ten-cents*

</div>

E.g. ☺

1)	sāam¹ gò³ sěi³ ~~hòu⁴ (zí²)~~	$3. 40
2)	sāp⁶ jī⁶ gò³ sāam¹ ~~hòu⁴ (zí²)~~	$12. 30
3)	gáu² āa⁶ gáu² gò³ gáu² ~~hòu⁴ (zí²)~~	$99. 90
4)	sěi³ gò³ bǔn³[☺]	$4. 50
5)	lŏeng⁵ gò³ jī⁶	$2. 20

b) Omission of "jāt¹" in one dollar and something

Usually, a local speaker will drop the "jāt¹" in the case of a single dollar amount followed by multiple ten-cent units.

<div style="border:1px solid">

~~jāt¹~~ + gò³個 + *figure of ten-cents*

</div>

E.g. ☺

1)	~~jāt¹~~ gò³ cāt¹	$1. 70
2)	~~jāt¹~~ gò³ jī⁶	$1. 20
3)	~~jāt¹~~ gò³ bǔn³	$1. 50

☺ The word "bǔn³半" *(half)* is used for half a dollar (50 cents) in a multi-unit monetary expression.

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sì³ sī⁴ sǐ⁵ sī⁶

4. **Asking for the price** ⊘ CD -T35

> Q: géi² (dō¹) cín² åa³?
>
> géi² cín² åa³?
>
> 幾（多）錢／呀？
>
> how much money/ PT
>
> = *How much is it?* (Answer: a price)

> Q: dím² màai⁶ åa³?
>
> 點／ 賣／ 呀？
>
> how/ to sell/ PT
>
> = *How much is it?* (Answer: a unit or measurement and a price)
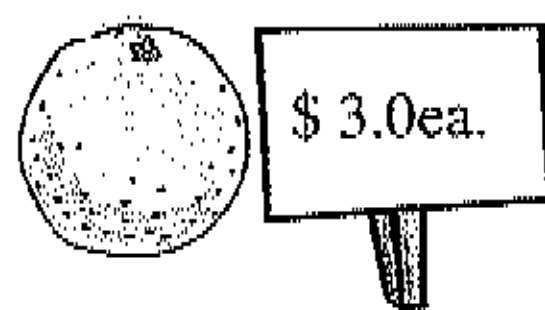
5. **To state the price for a quantity of things**

In Cantonese, no verb-to-be is required in a positive statement telling the price.

Things	+	[Nu. + MW.] + *Price $* / *Price $* + [Nu. + MW.]

E.g.

$ 2.0ea.

hōeng¹ zīu¹ jāt¹ tìu⁴ lŏeng⁵ mān¹
香　　蕉　　一　　條　　兩　　蚊

$ 3.0ea.

cáang² sāam¹ mān¹ (jāt¹)* gŏ³
橙　　三　　蚊　　一　　個

*Note: *The number "jāt¹" can be omitted when the price is for one item only.*

Practice Practice with your teacher or classmates with the following prices.

1.	2.	3.
$7.5/catty	$999ea.	$22.9ea.
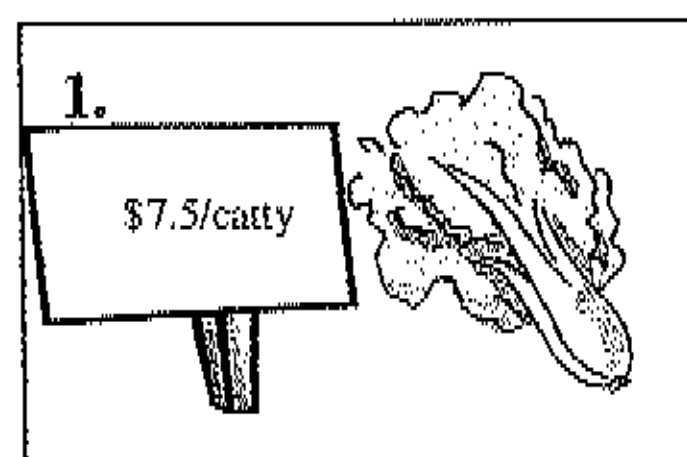
cŏi³ 菜(MW: gān¹斤)　　gáu² 狗(MW: zěk³隻)　　jýu² 魚(MW: tìu⁴條)

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sǐ³ sì⁴ sĭ⁵ sī̄⁶
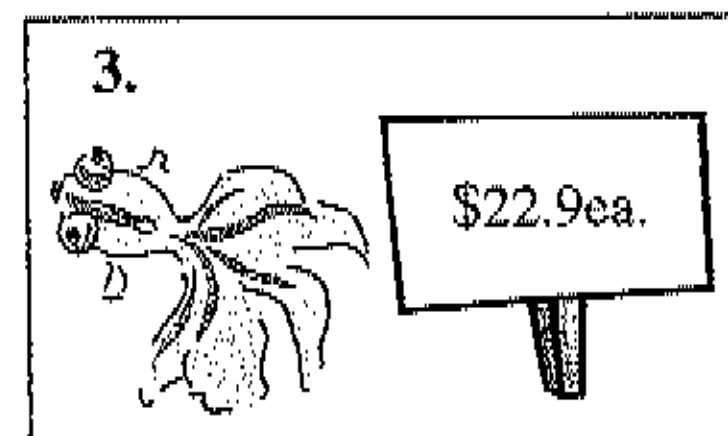
To be able to say and understand the day, date, month and year in Cantonese is a useful skill to acquire. For example "What day are you free for lunch?" or "What year were you born?" are very common questions that you may be asked. In this section you will learn the order of how to say the date in Cantonese, as well as learn how to ask some useful questions.

1. **Year**: To state a certain year, read off the year number digit by digit and put "nìn⁴ 年 (year)" at the end. ☺ CD -T36

? ? ? ?	+	nìn⁴ 年

jāt¹ lūk⁶ lìng⁴ lìng⁴ nìn⁴	一六〇〇年	*the year 1600*
jāt¹ gáu² séi³ jāt¹ nìn⁴	一九四一年	*the year 1941*
jāt¹ gáu² gáu² cāt¹ nìn⁴	一九九七年	*the year 1997*
jī⁶ lìng⁴ lìng⁴ båat³ nìn⁴	二〇〇八年	*the year 2008*

To ask for the year: ☺

E.g. 1) gām¹ nìn⁴ hāi⁶ géi² dō¹ nìn⁴ åa³? 今年係幾多年呀？
(*What year is it now?*)

2) něi⁵ bīn¹ nìn⁴ lèi⁴ Hōeng¹ Góng² gåa³? 你邊年嚟香港㗎？
(*Which year did you come to Hong Kong?*)

2. **Month**: Naming months is easy in Cantonese: the twelve months are referred to by their ordinal numbers, followed by the word "jyut⁶ 月 (month)". ☺ CD -T37

1 – 12	+	jyut⁶ 月 MOOV

jāt¹ jyut⁶	一月	*January*	cāt¹ jyut⁶	七月	*July*
jī⁶ jyut⁶	二月	*February*	båat³ jyut⁶	八月	*August*
sāam¹ jyut⁶	三月	*March*	gáu² jyut⁶	九月	*September*
séi³ jyut⁶	四月	*April*	sāp⁶ jyut⁶	十月	*October*
ňg⁵ jyut⁶	五月	*May*	sāp⁶ jāt¹ jyut⁶	十一月	*November*
lūk⁶ jyut⁶	六月	*June*	sāp⁶ jī⁶ jyut⁶	十二月	*December*

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sǐ³ sì⁴ sí⁵ sī⁶

<u>To ask for the month:</u> ☺

E.g.   1) jì⁴ gāa¹ hāi⁶ <u>géi² dō¹</u> jy̆ut⁶ åa³? 而家係幾多月呀？

         jì⁴ gāa¹ hāi⁶ <u>géi²</u> jy̆ut⁶ åa³? 而家係幾月呀？
         (<u>What</u> month is this?)

  2) něi⁵ <u>géi²</u> jy̆ut⁶ sāang¹ jāt⁶ gåa³? 你幾月生日㗎？

         něi⁵ <u>bīn¹ gǒ³</u> jy̆ut⁶ sāang¹ jāt⁶ gåa³? 你邊個月生日㗎？
         (<u>Which</u> month is your birthday?)

3. **Days of the month**: When referring to a day in a month, either "hŏu⁶號 (*number*)" or "jāt⁶日 (*day*)" is used as an indicator, and placed after the appropriate number (date: 1-31). "hŏu⁶ 號" is more often used in the spoken language than "jāt⁶日". ☺ CD -T38

1 – 31	+	hŏu⁶ 號 / jāt⁶ 日

jāt¹ hŏu⁶	一號	*1ˢᵗ day of the month*
jī⁶ hŏu⁶	二號	*2ⁿᵈ day of the month*
sāam¹ hŏu⁶	三號	*3ʳᵈ day of the month*
jī⁶ sāp⁶ gáu² hŏu⁶	二十九號	*29ᵗʰ day of the month*
sāam¹ sāp⁶ hŏu⁶	三十號	*30ᵗʰ day of the month*
sāam¹ sāp⁶ jāt¹ hŏu⁶	三十一號	*31ˢᵗ day of the month*

<u>To ask for the date:</u> ☺

E.g.   1) gām¹ jāt⁶ hāi⁶ <u>géi² dō¹</u> hŏu⁶ åa³? 今日係幾多號呀？

         gām¹ jāt⁶ hāi⁶ <u>géi²</u> hŏu⁶ åa³? 今日係幾號呀？
         (<u>What</u> day of the month is it today?)

  2) něi⁵ <u>géi²</u> hŏu⁶ sāang¹ jāt⁶ gåa³? 你幾號生日㗎？

         něi⁵ <u>bīn¹</u> jāt⁶ sāang¹ jāt⁶ gåa³? 你邊日生日㗎？
         (<u>Which</u> day of the month is your birthday?)

4. **Days of the week**: In Chinese, a week begins on Monday and ends on Sunday. The days of the week from Monday to Saturday are expressed by "sīng¹ kèi⁴星期" (*week*) or "lăi⁵ båai³ 禮拜" (*week; religious service*) followed by the numbers one to six. Sunday is suffixed with the word "jāt⁶日" (*day; sun*). Be careful of the similar pronunciation of Sunday and Monday in Cantonese which is distinguished by only a tone difference. ☺ CD -T39

sīng¹ kèi⁴ 星期   +   1 ~ 6
lăi⁵ båai³ 禮拜   +   1 ~ 6

<u>Key for tones:</u>
sī¹ sí² sî³ sì⁴ sĭ⁵ sī⁶

sīng¹ kèi⁴ jāt¹	星期一	lǎi⁵ bǎai³ jāt¹	禮拜一	*Monday*
sīng¹ kèi⁴ jī⁶	星期二	lǎi⁵ bǎai³ jī⁶	禮拜二	*Tuesday*
sīng¹ kèi⁴ sāam¹	星期三	lǎi⁵ bǎai³ sāam¹	禮拜三	*Wednesday*
sīng¹ kèi⁴ sèi³	星期四	lǎi⁵ bǎai³ sèi³	禮拜四	*Thursday*
sīng¹ kèi⁴ nǧ⁵	星期五	lǎi⁵ bǎai³ nǧ⁵	禮拜五	*Friday*
sīng¹ kèi⁴ lūk⁶	星期六	lǎi⁵ bǎai³ lūk⁶	禮拜六	*Saturday*
sīng¹ kèi⁴ jāt⁶	星期日	lǎi⁵ bǎai³ jāt⁶	禮拜日	*Sunday*

To ask for the day of week: ☺

E.g.   1) gām¹ jāt⁶ hǎi⁶ sīng¹ kèi⁴ <u>géi²</u> åa³? 今日係星期幾呀？

gām¹ jāt⁶ hǎi⁶ lǎi⁵ bǎai³ <u>géi²</u> åa³? 今日係禮拜幾呀？

(<u>Which</u> day of the week is it today?)

2) něi⁵ <u>bīn¹ gǒ³</u> sīng¹ kèi⁴ fǒng³ gåa³ åa³? 你邊個星期放假呀？

něi⁵ <u>bīn¹ gǒ³</u> lǎi⁵ bǎai³ fǒng³ gåa³ åa³? 你邊個禮拜放假呀？

(<u>Which</u> week are you on holiday?)

5.   **Word order of date indicators**: In Cantonese, the order of dates is the reverse of the English format, beginning with the year and ending with the day.   The specification of a date follows the general principle: **the larger unit comes before the smaller unit.**

nìn⁴	–	jv̄ut⁶	–	hǒu⁶/jāt⁶	–	sīng¹ kèi⁴/lǎi⁵ bǎai³
year		*month*		*date*		*day of week*

For example: *Friday, 31ˢᵗ October 2008*

<u>jī⁶ lìng⁴ lìng⁴ bǎat³ nìn⁴</u>   <u>sāp⁶ jv̄ut⁶</u>   <u>sāam¹ sāp⁶ jāt¹ hǒu⁶</u>   <u>sīng¹ kèi⁴ nǧ⁵</u>

二　〇　〇　八　年　　十　月　　三　十　一　號　　星　期　五

Practice   Say the following dates in Cantonese.

> *16ᵗʰ January*
>
> *25ᵗʰ December*
>
> *Sunday, 1ˢᵗ April*
>
> *Monday, 9ᵗʰ June*
>
> *Wednesday, 8ᵗʰ March, 2006*
>
> *Saturday, 26ᵗʰ August, 2101*

6. How to ask for specific dates: ⊙ CD -T40

1)	gām¹ nìn⁴ hãi⁶ géi² (dō¹) nìn⁴ åa³? 今 年/ 係/ 幾（多）年/ 呀？ this year/ is/ what year/ PT =*What year is it now?*
2)	jì⁴ gāa¹ hãi⁶ géi² (dō¹) jyut⁶ åa³? 而 家/ 係/ 幾（多）月/ 呀？ now/ is/ what month/ PT =*What month is this?*
3)	gām¹ jãt⁶ hãi⁶ géi² (dō¹) hõu⁶ åa³? 今 日/ 係/ 幾（多）號/ 呀？ today/ is/ what number/ PT =*What day of the month is it today?*
4)	gām¹ jãt⁶ hãi⁶ sīng¹ kèi⁴ géi² åa³? 今 日/ 係/ 星 期/ 幾/ 呀？ today/ is/ week/ how many/ PT =*What day of the week is it today?*
5)	gām¹ jãt⁶ hãi⁶ géi² jyut⁶ géi² hõu⁶ åa³? 今 日/ 係/ 幾 月/ 幾 號/ 呀？ today/ is/ what month/ what number/ PT =*What is today's date?*
6)	gām¹ jãt⁶ hãi⁶ géi² jyut⁶ géi² hõu⁶ sīng¹ kèi⁴ géi² åa³? 今 日/ 係/ 幾 月/ 幾 號/ 星 期 幾/ 呀？ today/ is/ what month/ what number/ what day of week/ PT = *What is the day and date today?*

Practice

Use the calendar of this year to ask and answer the following questions in Cantonese.

1. What day of the month is it today?

2. What day of the week is it today?

3. What is today's date?

4. What is the date of *next* (hãa⁶ jãt¹ gõ³ 下一個) Sunday?

5. What day of the week is your birthday this year?

6. What day of the week is *Christmas* (sìng³ dãan³ zit³ 聖誕節) this year?

7. What day of the week is next *New Year* (sān¹ nìn⁴ 新年)?

8. What year is it *next year* (cēot¹ nìn⁴ 出年)?

The pace in Hong Kong is fast and everybody seems busy. Hong Kong people make the most of their time and they both work and play hard. Offices normally open at 9a.m. and close at 5 or 5:30p.m., but many people work late into the evening. After work, some spend their leisure time playing mahjong, karaoke or sports, but many go on continuing education like learning foreign languages or musical instruments. With so many people on a busy schedule, it is useful to know how to say the time of the day in Cantonese.
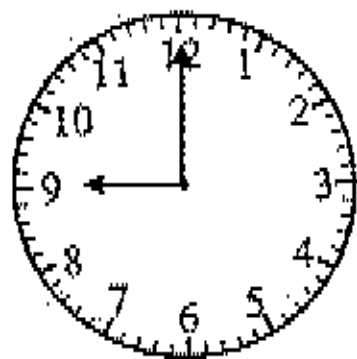
1. Hour ☺ CD -T41

To say the time in hours, read off the number of the hour hand and put "**dím²點** *(dot)*" at the end. Note that a more complete way of saying the time is "**dím² zūng¹點鐘***(o'clock: basic time unit)*" but the shorter version "**dím²點**" is the one you are more likely to hear.
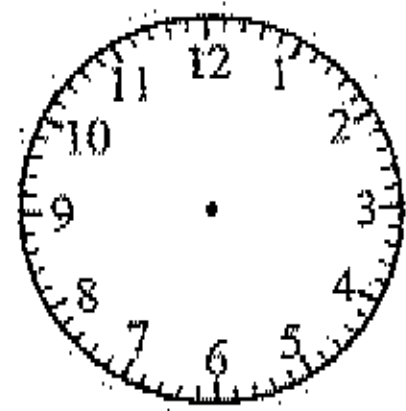
[clock face]	$1 - 12$ + dím² zūng¹ 點鐘

For example: ☺
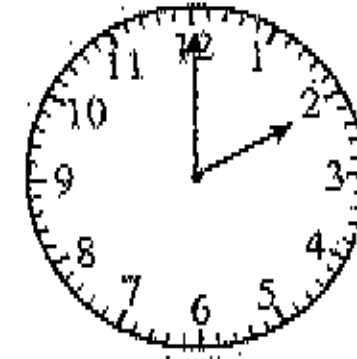
gáu² dím²   cāt¹ dím²   sei̊³ dím²   lŏeng⁵ dím²*

*Note that for "two o'clock", the numeral is always "**lŏeng⁵ 兩**" and **never** "**jī⁶ 二**".

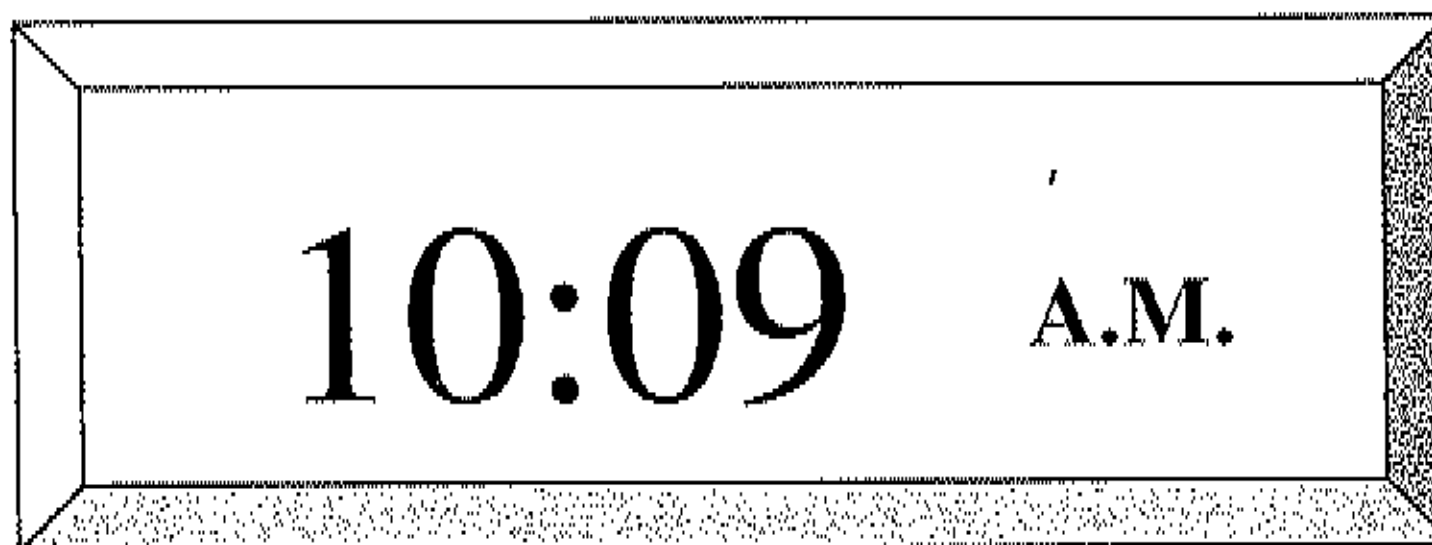Write and read out the following times in Cantonese, e.g. 10 o'clock = săp⁶ dím²

2. Exact minute ☉ CD -T42

The Cantonese for minute is "fān¹ 分". The format is straightforward: after saying the hour, say the number of minutes followed by "fān¹ 分":

$$\text{1-12 dím² 點 : 0-59 fān¹ 分}$$

E.g. ☉

10:09 A.M.

<u>sŏeng⁶ nğ⁵ (/sŏeng⁶ zåu³) såp⁶ dím² lìng⁴ gáu² fān¹</u>

Here are some more examples of minute times:

:01 lìng⁴ jāt¹ fān¹	:02 lìng⁴ jī⁶* fān¹	:03 lìng⁴ sāam¹ fān¹
:04 lìng⁴ sěi³ fān¹	:05 lìng⁴ nğ⁵ fān¹	:06 lìng⁴ lŭk⁶ fān¹
:07 lìng⁴ cāt¹ fān¹	:08 lìng⁴ båat³ fān¹	:09 lìng⁴ gáu² fān¹
:10 săp⁶ fān¹	:20 jī⁶ săp⁶ fān¹	:30 sāam¹ săp⁶ fān¹
:40 sěi³ săp⁶ fān¹	:50 nğ⁵ săp⁶ fān¹	:59 nğ⁵ săp⁶ gáu² fān¹

*Note that for "Υ o'clock and **two** minutes," it is always "Υ dím² lìng⁴ jī⁶ fān¹", and never "Υ dím² lìng⁴ lŏeng⁵ fān¹".
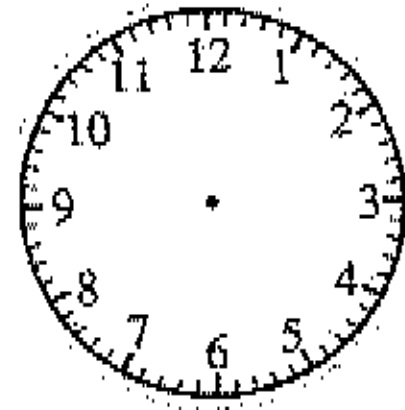
Practice

Read out the following times in hours and exact minutes in Cantonese.
E.g. 10:15 = săp⁶ dím² săp⁶ nğ⁵ fān¹

3. Hour & 5-minute unit

A convenient and commonly used way to say the time is to use the 5-minute units on a clock face. After saying the hour, just follow it with numbers 1-5 or 7-11 where the minute hand is pointing to. The exception is 6 and 12. 12 is not used since it is o'clock time. When the minute hand strikes 6, the word "bǔn³半", meaning "half" of the o'clock is used.
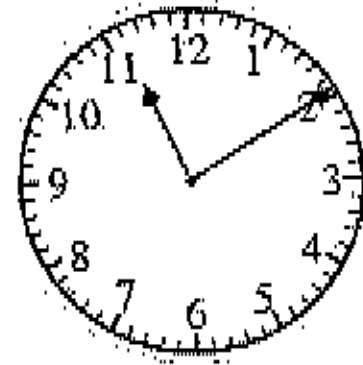

	1-5	
1-12 dím²點 :	~~6~~ bǔn³半	
	7-11	

E.g. ⊕CD-T43

ngǔ⁵ dím² sěi³	bǎat³ dím² jāt¹	sǎp⁶ jāt¹ dím² jī⁶	cāt¹ dím² bǔn³

Practice

Read out the following times in hours and 5-minute units in Cantonese.

E.g. 8:15 = bǎat³ dím² sāam¹

2:40 = _____   7:30 = _____

5:55 = _____   11:00 = _____

1:05 = _____   3:37 = _____

4. Clock time & the time of the day ⊕CD-T44

Sometimes people want to be more specific about the time of the day, so they put a specific term "sōeng⁶ zǎu³上畫 (for A.M.)" or "hǎa⁶ zǎu³下畫 (for P.M.)" before (not after) the clock time. Here are some more examples:

A.M.	sōeng⁶ zǎu³ 上畫/ sōeng⁶ ngǔ⁵上午	(1-11 + dím²點)
Noon	zūng¹ ngǔ⁵中午	(12 + dím²點)
P.M.	hǎa⁶ zǎu³下畫/ hǎa⁶ ngǔ⁵下午	(1-11 + dím²點)
Midnight	ngǔ⁵ jě⁶午夜	(12 + dím²點)

zīu¹ tàu⁴ zóu² 朝 頭 早 *(in the morning)*	ǎan³ zǎu³ 晏 晝 *(in the afternoon)*	jě⁶ mǎan⁵ 夜 晚 *(in the evening)*

Key for tones:
sī¹ sí² sǐ³ sì⁴ sǐ⁵ sī⁶

> **Practice**

Read out the time of the day in Cantonese:

2:15 in the afternoon	=	åan³ zåu³ lŏeng⁵ dím² sāam¹
6:12 in the morning	=	
8:30 in the evening	=	
4:00 in the afternoon	=	
10:20 a.m.	=	
9:45 p.m.	=	

5. How to ask and tell the current time ☺ CD -T45

Q:	jì⁴ gāa¹ géi² dō¹ dím² zūng¹ åa³?
	jì⁴ gāa¹ géi² dō¹ dím² åa³?
	jì⁴ gāa¹ géi² dím² zūng¹ åa³?
	jì⁴ gāa¹ géi² dím² åa³? *(the shortest version is more often used)*
	而家/ 幾(多) 點(鐘)/ 呀 ?
	now/ what time/ PT
	= *What time is it now?*
A:	jì⁴ gāa¹ (hǎi⁶)* + *o'clock.*
	而 家/ （係）
	now/ is
	= *It's now ____(o'clock).*

*Note that the verb "hǎi⁶" is unnecessary except when the speaker wants to emphasize the current time.

> **Practice**

Practice with your teacher or classmates with the following times.

åan³ zåu³ sāam¹ dím² såp⁶		= 3:50 p.m.
zīu¹ tàu⁴ zóu² gáu² dím² sāam¹ såp⁶ sāam¹ fān¹	=	
jē⁶ mǎan⁵ båat³ dím² bǔn³	=	
hāa⁶ zåu³ ng̊⁵ dím² såp⁶ jāt¹	=	
sŏeng⁶ zåu³ sěi³ dím² cāt¹	=	
jē⁶ mǎan⁵ såp⁶ dím² jī⁶ såp⁶ båat³ fān¹	=	
zūng¹ ng̊⁵ såp⁶ jī⁶ dím² bǔn³	=	
ng̊⁵ jē⁶ såp⁶ jī⁶ dím² lìng⁴ ng̊⁵ fān¹	=	

In Cantonese, when nouns are counted or its quantity made specific, a **Measure Word** must be included. Different types of nouns usually have different measure words. This concept may be new to some foreigners and can present some difficulties to them at the beginning, but it is wise to spend some time to grasp this fundamental concept of Chinese early on.

Note: in English, some of the nouns have measure words similar to Cantonese, e.g. a bunch of grapes, a piece of string, a sheet of paper, a bowl of sugar, a cup of tea, etc.

1. **Measure words/Classifiers**

   Measure words are words that express a unit of things or actions. They serve to sort nouns into **semantic classes of objects** (indicating meaning), and is also known as '**classifiers**'.

   Measure words are based on distinctive features of shape, size, nature or function. They may also demonstrate some kind of properties that accounts for its use with certain types of objects. Every noun in Cantonese has its own specific measure word, which should be learned together with the word. Sometimes there are two or more alternative measure words for the same noun.

   Here are some common measure words: ☺ CD -T46

1)	go³	個	*for persons; round objects; abstract things, such as questions or ideas*
2)	gaa³	架	*for vehicles; machines, e.g. cars, airplane.*
3)	gin⁶	件	*for upper body items of clothing, e.g. shirt, coat.*
4)	gaan¹	間	*for buildings; houses; rooms*
5)	bún²	本	*for books; magazines*
6)	zek³	隻	*for most animals; ships; one of a pair*
7)	deoi³	對	*for a pair of objects, such as shoes, hands, chopsticks*
8)	tiu⁴	條	*for streets or things that are long and narrow*
9)	zoeng¹	張	*for paper; cards; objects with a flat surface, such as chairs, tables, etc.*
10)	zi¹	枝	*for objects that are cylindrical, rigid, long and thin, e.g. pens, cigarettes*
11)	bui¹	杯	*literally a "cup", for the quantity of something that a cup will hold*
12)	wún²	碗	*literally a "bowl", for quantity of something that a bowl will hold*
13)	dip⁶	碟	*literally a "plate", for quantity of something that a plate will hold*
14)	gun³	罐	*literally a "can", for quantity of something that a can will hold*
15)	fan⁶	份	*for objects in a set, such as documents, newspapers; a sandwich or a job*

2. Number of objects

A measure word (MW) helps describe the quantity and quality (such as distinctive features of shape, natural kind and function) of a noun in counting. A number alone usually cannot function enough as an attributive and must be combined with a measure word inserted between the cardinal number and the noun it modifies.

> **Numeral +   Measure Word   +   Noun/Nominal phrase**

For example: ☺ CD -T47

jāt¹ go̊³ jàn⁴	一個人	*one person*
jāt¹ gåa³ cē¹	一架車	*one vehicle*
jāt¹ gìn⁶ sāam¹	一件衫	*one piece of clothing*
jāt¹ gāan¹ fóng²	一間房	*one room*
jāt¹ bún² sȳu¹	一本書	*one book*
jāt¹ ze̊k³ gáu²	一隻狗	*one dog*
jāt¹ de̊oi³ hàai⁴	一對鞋	*one pair of shoes*
jāt¹ tìu⁴ fů³	一條褲	*one (pair of) trousers*
jāt¹ zōeng¹ zí²	一張紙	*one sheet of paper*
jāt¹ zī¹ bāt¹	一枝筆	*one pen*
jāt¹ būi¹ záu²	一杯酒	*one glass (cup) of wine*
jāt¹ wún² fāan⁶	一碗飯	*one bowl of rice*
jāt¹ dīp⁶ cói³	一碟菜	*one plate of vegetables*
jāt¹ gůn³ hó² lōk⁶	一罐可樂	*one can of coke*
jāt¹ fån⁶ sāam¹ màn⁴ zī⁶	一份三文治	*one sandwich*

The measure word "**go̊³**個" is the commonest and most neutral in Cantonese. It is used with all noun words denoting people as well as individual items which do not call for a specific measure word. Thus abstract nouns, which refer to non-concrete entities lacking physical features, generally take "**go̊³**個" as their measure word. If there is any doubt about what specific measure word to use for a noun, it is usually safe to use "**go̊³**個" (you may be corrected if you are obviously wrong).
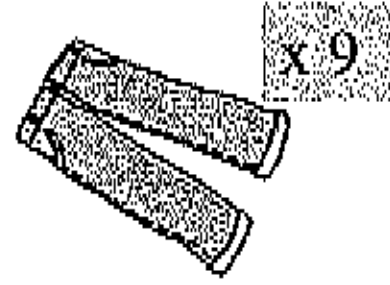
3. Counting things in twos

Both "jī⁶二" and "lŏeng⁵兩" mean *"two"*. When the number "two" is used before a measure word (or before a noun), "lŏeng⁵兩" is normally used instead of "jī⁶二", as in "lŏeng⁵ go̊³ jàn⁴兩個人" (*two persons*). But with numbers larger than ten (12, 20, 22, 32 etc.), "jī⁶二" is used always, as in "sāp⁶ jī⁶ go̊³ jàn⁴十二個人" (*twelve persons*).

Practice

Try to figure out what measure words should be used for the following items and count them with the given numbers.
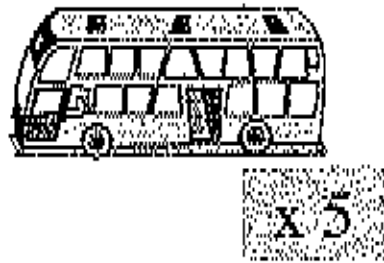
x3 — sāam¹ 衫

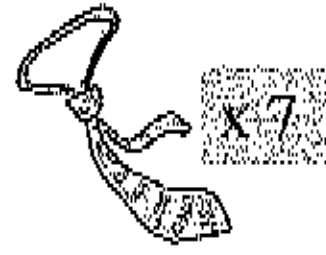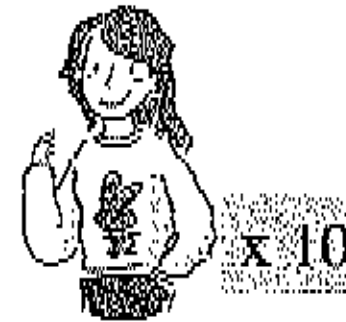x9 — fù³ 褲

x1 — hàai⁴ 鞋

x2 — māt⁶ 襪

x3 — cē¹ 車

x8 — gáu² 狗

x7 — tāai¹ 呔

x1 — ūk¹ 屋

x6 — kāat¹ 咭

x2 — càa⁴ 茶

x10 — jàn⁴ 人

x4 — sāam¹ màn⁴ zī⁶ 三文治