

How To Use: 的, 地, And 得 In Chinese

These particles are some of the hardest components of Chinese grammar. Even native speakers often mix them up.

The use of the particle “de” is to modify another noun, verb, or adjective. For example, if Chinese people want to say “quietly,” they would say “安静地 (Ān jìng de).” Or, if they would want to say “Sara’s house,” they would say “莎拉 de 房子.”

There are three de particles. They are all pronounced “de” with the neutral tone when used as a particle, which is why people can easily confuse them with one another. Similar to how “their, they’re, and there” are some of the most common typos in the English, “的,” “得,” and “地” are also some of the most common grammar mistakes in [Chinese language](#).

- 的 (de) for modifying nouns
- 得 (de), for modifying verbs
- 地 (de), for modifying adjectives (into adverbs)

1. 的, NOUN MODIFIER

Used as a noun modifier, “的 (de)” is most commonly used to indicate possession, such as the “’s” in English. As previously mentioned, “**Sara’s** house” would be “莎拉的房子 (Shā lā de fáng zi).”

“的 (de)” is also used in noun attribution, where it is placed between an adjective and a noun. For example:

“红色的自行车 (Hóng sè de zì xíng chē).”

The red bike.

Here are some basic structure formulas for you that cover most uses of the particle:

POSSESSIVE “的”

Noun + 的 + Noun

ATTRIBUTIVE “的”

Adjective + 的 + Noun

2. 得, VERB MODIFIER

This “de” is usually placed after verbs in order to signify the outcome of that verb or to modify it. It is particularly tricky for English speakers because there’s no equivalent in English. An example of how 得 (de) can be used is:

他唱得很好 (Tā chàng dé hěn hǎo).
He sang very well.

Note how the 得 (de) particle came after the verb 唱 (Chàng), or “sing.”

It is also used as a potential complement, giving someone the ability to do something. For example:

你看得见吗 (Nǐ kàn dé jiàn ma) ?
Can you see?

我不戴眼镜就看不见 (Wǒ bù dài yǎn jìng jiù kàn bù jiàn).
I can’t see without my glasses.

Notice that when the sentence changes to “I can’t...” the 得 (de) particle is replaced by the negative word “不 (bù).” This is especially difficult to grasp.

Another way the 得 (de) particle is used is in comparison. For example:

洛杉矶比旧金山热得多 (Luò shān jī bǐ jiù jīn shān rè dé duō).
Los Angeles is a lot hotter than San Francisco.

When it’s not used as a particle 得 (de) is also used on it’s own as part of “得到 (dé dào)” or “to gain.” Here, it takes on the second tone, "dé." It can also be pronounced as “děi” with the third tone, where it then means “must.”

Here are some basic structure formulas for you:

VERB MODIFIER 得

Verb + 得 + Adjective

COMPARATIVE 得

Adjective + 得 + Comparison word (ie more, less)

3. 地, THE ADJECTIVE MODIFIER

This “de” particle is usually placed after adjectives in order to transform them into adverbs. It is most like the suffix “-ly” in English. It’s fairly straightforward. An example is:

他快地跑过来 (Tā kuài kuài dì pǎo guò lái).

He **quickly** ran over.

Additional Tip: When adjectives are transformed into adverbs with “de” in Chinese, they are often repeated twice. 快 (Kuài) is “quick”, but when it’s attached to 地 it becomes “快地 (Kuài kuài dì)” or literally, “Quick quick-ly.” Many adjectives do this in [Chinese language](#) for emphasis purposes.

When 地 (de) is not used as a particle, it is read “dì” and used to mean “ground” or “earth.” For example, 土地 (tǔ dì) is “dirt.”

Here’s a quick formula:

ADVERBIAL 地

Adjective + 地 + Verb