Tone Sandhi

The tones as outlined above are consistent 90% of the time. However, as with most rules there are a few exceptions. These variations are called *tone sandhi* [**suhn**-dee].

Consecutive 3rd Tones: The first of these changes occurs when there are two or more 3rd tones in a sequence. Take, for example, a common greeting in Chinese: nǐ hǎo. Whether you attempt to say these either as full 3rd tones or as half 3rd tones outlined in the previous section, the pronunciation is very awkward. Thus, the first one changes to a 2nd tone, while the last is pronounced as a full or half tone depending on if something follows it.

If there are more than two 3rd tones in a row, the tone is changed for the syllable immediately before the final 3rd tone, counting by twos for as many consecutive 3rd tones as there are. The following shows changes for two-, three-, and four-syllable combinations.

Written as:	nǐ hǎo	wǒ hěn hǎo	wǒ yě hěn hǎo
Pronounced as:	ní hǎo	wǒ hén hǎo	wó yě hén hǎo

Bù: The word for “no” or “not” in Chinese is *bù*. It is pronounced as a 4th tone unless

a syllable with a 4th tone follows it, whereupon it is pronounced as a 2nd tone. Practice the changing tone in the examples listed in the chart below.

SITUATION	CHANGE	EXAMPLES	ENGLISH
bù + 1st	×	bù zhīdào	not know
bù + 2nd	×	bù xíng	not okay
bù + 3rd	×	bù hǎo	not good
bù + 4th	bú	bú qù	not go

Yī: As you learned previously, the word for "one" in Chinese is *yī*. This is always pronounced as a 1st tone when counting (both ordinal and cardinal numbers). However, when talking about amounts, its tone pattern mimics *bù* exactly. That is to say, it is pronounced as a 2nd tone when followed by a 4th tone syllable, but when

followed by syllables of any other tone it is pronounced as a 4th tone.

ITUATION	CHANGE	EXAMPLES	ENGLISH
counting	×	yī, èr, sān	one, two three
ordering	×	dì yī, dì èr	first, second
yī + 1st	yì	yì xiāng	a box
yī + 2nd	yì	yì háng	a line
yī + 3rd	yì	yì kǔn	a bundle
yī + 4th	yí	yí lù	the whole way

Even though the tone sandhi for *yī* and *bù* might not always be indicated in the *pīnyīn*, they are always pronounced according to the rules above.