



## Absolute Beginner Cantonese

Lessons 1-25

1-25

## Introduction

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This is Innovative Language Learning.

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The course consists of lessons centered on a practical, real-life conversation.

In each lesson, first, we'll introduce the background of the conversation.

Then, you'll hear the conversation two times:

One time at natural native speed and one time with the English translation.

After the conversation, you'll learn carefully selected vocabulary and key grammar concepts.

Next, you'll hear the conversation 1 time at natural native speed at the end of the lesson.

Finally, practice what you have learned with the review track. Repeat the words and phrases you hear in the review track aloud to practice pronunciation and reinforce what you have learned.

Before starting the lessons, go to [InnovativeLanguage.com/audiobooks](https://www.innovativelanguage.com/audiobooks) to get the lesson notes for this course and sign up for your FREE lifetime account.



## Absolute Beginner S1

### What's in a Cantonese Name?

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## Traditional Chinese

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你好。  
 你好。  
 我叫偉仔，你呢？  
 我叫嘉玲。

## Jyutping

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nei5 hou2.  
 nei5 hou2.  
 ngo5 giu3 wai5 zai2, nei5 nei1?  
 ngo5 giu3 gaal ling4.

## English

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Hello.  
 Hello.  
 I'm Tony Leung. And you?  
 I'm Carina Lau.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
你好	nei5 hou2	hello
我	ngo5	I
叫	giu3	to be called; call
你	nei5	you
你呢	nei5 nei1	and you
好	hou2	very
嘉玲	gaal ling4	Carina Lau
偉仔	wai5 zai2	Tony Leung

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

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人們在說你好。	jan4 mun4 zoi6 syut3 nei5 hou2.	The people are saying, "Hello."
我叫Nicole。	ngo5 giu3 Nicole.	I'm (called) Nicole.
我叫Nicole。	ngo5 giu3 Nicole.	I'm (called) Nicole.
你叫咩名?	nei5 giu3 mel meng2?	What's your name?
你最近點啊?	nei5 zeoi3 gan6 dim2 aa3?	How have you been lately?
我最近好好, 你呢?	ngo5 zeoi3 gan6 hou2 hou2, nei5 nel?	I've been really good lately, and you?
今日好開心啊!	gam1 jat6 hou2 hoil sam1 aa3!	Today (I'm) very happy!
我唔鍾意嘉玲。	ngo5 m4 zung1 ji3 gaal ling4.	I don't like Carina.
我鍾意偉仔。	ngo5 zung1 ji3 wai5 zai2.	I like Tony Leung.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Introducing Yourself and Asking Other's Names.

我叫偉仔, 你呢?

ngo5 giu3 wai5 zai2, nei5 nel?

"I'm Tony Leung. And you?"

The way to introduce yourself in Cantonese is very similar to English. In this case, we follow a simple pattern:

我叫 (ngo5 giu3) - "I'm called" + (name)

The sentence follows the subject (我) + verb (叫) + object (name) sentence structure, which is standard for Cantonese.

For Example:

1. 我叫Nicole。  
ngo5 giu3 Nicole  
"I'm Nicole."
2. 我叫Matt。  
ngo5 giu3 Matt  
"I'm Matt."

你呢 (nei5 nel) "and you?"

We can use 你呢 (nei5 nel) on any occasion where you want to ask for the other person's information or opinion. It is normal to first say something about yourself before you ask someone else 你呢.

## Cultural Insight

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### What is Your Name?

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When dealing with names in Cantonese, there are two ground rules you want to follow.

In the Chinese naming system, the given name is placed after the surname. Imagine your name in English. To turn your name into a Cantonese name, just put your family name first, and your first name, last. So for instance, Paul Johnson would now be Johnson Paul. For a Cantonese example, Tony Leung would be 梁朝偉, (loeng4 ciu4 wai5) - Literally, Leung Tony.

A second guideline is that it is more polite in Cantonese to introduce your name before asking others theirs. It is very common to simply ask for the family name of someone who is older than you as a sign of respect. For example, 你貴姓? (nei5 gwai3 seng3?) - "What is your family name?"



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Shooting the Breeze in Cantonese

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## Traditional Chinese

你最近點啊？  
 幾好，你呢？  
 幾好。

## Jyutping

nei5 zeoi3 gan6 dim2 aa3?  
 gei2 hou2, nei5 nei?  
 gei2 hou2.

## English

How are you lately?  
 Pretty good. And you?  
 Not bad.

2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
你	nei5	you
最近	zeoi3 gan6	lately
點啊	dim2 aa1	What's up?
幾好	gei2 hou2	pretty good
啊	aa1	ahhh
好好	hou2 hou2	very good
燒賣	siu1 maai2	pork and mushroom dumplings

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

你最近點啊？	nei5 zeoi3 gan6 dim2 aa3?	How have you been lately?
我最近幾好。	ngo5 zeoi3 gan6 gei2 hou2.	I've been all right lately.
呢排點啊？	ni1 paai4 dim2 aa3?	How are you doing lately?

我覺得佢幾好。	ngo5 gok3 dak1 keoi5 gei2 hou2.	I think he is pretty good.
呢排點啊?	nil paai4 dim2 aa3?	How are you doing lately?
我好好。	ngo5 hou2 hou2.	I'm very good/well.
我要兩籠燒賣。	ngo5 jiu3 loeng5 lung4 siul maai2.	I want two baskets of pork and mushroom dumplings.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Asking, "How have you been?"

你最近點啊?

nei5 zeoi3 gan6 dim2 aa3?

"How are you lately?"

When asking a question in Cantonese, you place the question in statement form. For example, "How are you?" turns into "You are how," as a statement: 你點啊? (nei5 dim2 aa3?) - "How are you?" To sound more colloquial and informal, add an 啊 (aa3) at the end of the sentence.

In the dialogue, we saw the sentence 你最近點啊? (nei5 zeoi3 gan6 dim2 aa3?)

- "How have you been lately?" In Cantonese, the adverb 最近 (zeoi3 gan6) -

"lately" comes right after the subject. So it is "you lately how," plus 啊. Also, native speakers usually say it without the 你, that is, 最近點啊 or 點啊.

If someone asks you this question, 你最近點啊? you can reply with 我最近幾好啊 (ngo5 zeoi3 gan6 gei2 hou2 aal.) - "I've been good lately." Notice that the adverb 最近 is in the same position here after the subject 我.

## Cultural Insight

### Exchanging Pleasantries

Exchanging pleasantries and engaging in small talk is a big part of the Cantonese speaking culture. There are a few ways to be friendly with old friends or casual acquaintances.

Some examples of "small talk" include:

1. 食左飯未?

sik6 zo2 faan6 mei6

"Have you eaten yet?"

2. 最近點啊?  
zeoi3 gan6 dim2 aa3  
"How have you been lately?"
3. 點啊?  
dim2 aa3  
"What's up?"

Another way to engage in small talk is by asking someone if they have eaten, such as 得閒飲茶 (dak1 haan4 jam2 caa4.) - "Have Cantonese breakfast or brunch or dim sum when you have time." This doesn't necessarily mean an invitation to brunch together, but functions more as "I'll call you."



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The Cantonese Identity Mix-Up

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## Traditional Chinese

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唔該，你係唔係偉仔？  
 唔係。  
 唔好意思。  
 唔緊要。

## Jyutping

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m4 goi1, nei5 hai6 m4 hai6 wai5 zai2?  
 m4 hai6.  
 m4 hou2 ji3 sil.  
 m4 gan2 jiu3.

## English

---

Excuse me, are you Tony Leung?  
 No.  
 Sorry.  
 Never mind.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
唔好意思		excuse me, sorry
係	hai6	to be
唔係	m4 hai6	no
唔緊要	m4 gan2 jiu3	it doesn't matter
廣東話	gwong2 dung1 waa2	Cantonese language
學	hok6	to learn
食	sik6	to eat
做	zou6	to do; to work

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

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唔好意思，洗手間喺邊？	m4 hou2 ji3 sil, sai2 sau2 gaan1 hai2 bin1?	Excuse me, where is the washroom?
佢係女仔。	keoi5 hai6 neoi5 zai2.	She is a girl.
佢最近唔係幾好。	keoi5 zeoi3 gan6 m4 hai6 gei2 hou2.	He hasn't been doing too well lately.
唔緊要。	m4 gan2 jiu3.	Doesn't matter.
我識講廣東話。	ngo5 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2.	I (know how to) speak Cantonese.
你識唔識講廣東話？	nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2?	Do you (know how to) speak Cantonese?
我學過跳舞。	ngo5 hok6 gwo3 tiu3 mou5.	I've learned dancing.
一齊食嘢。	jat1 cai4 sik6 je5.	Eat together.
最近好多嘢做。	zeoi3 gan6 hou2 dol je5 zou6.	(There's) a lot of stuff to do lately.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 係, hai6 ("to be")

唔該，你係唔係偉仔？

m4 goi1, nei5 hai6 m4 hai6 wai5 zai2?

"Excuse me, are you Tony Leung?"

In Cantonese, the verb 係 (hai6) - "to be" links the subject of the sentence with the object. For example, take 我係佢嘅朋友。(ngo5 hai6 keoi5 ge3 pang4 jau5) - "I'm his/her friend." Here, 係 links the subject 我 with the object 嘅朋友.

Another feature of this verb and many other verbs in Cantonese is how we use them when asking a question. Cantonese uses an V-唔-V approach to asking a question. We duplicate the verb with the negation 唔 placed in the middle.

Some simple verbs that you can use in this format include:

- 做唔做  
zou6 m4 zou6  
"to do or not to do"
- 食唔食  
sik6 m4 sik6  
"to eat or not to eat"
- 學唔學  
hok6 m4 hok6  
"to learn or not to learn"

## Cultural Insight

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### Mistakes in Cantonese

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Mistakes and misunderstandings are bound to happen when learning a language. Luckily, most Cantonese people are very forgiving about innocent mistakes and are quite amused at any non-native speaker speaking the language. With that said, here are two phrases that you can use when cultural misstep takes place:

1. 唔好意思。

m4 hou2 ji3 sil

"Excuse me."

You can use this very casual and versatile phrase in a lot of different situations.

2. 唔該。

m4 goil

"Excuse me." or "Thank you."

You can use this phrase just to bring attention to a certain situation. If you need to pass someone on the street, you can say 唔該.

Many loan words have been adopted in Hong Kong and thus, have been disseminated through the Cantonese-speaking lexicon. "Hello" in Cantonese is 哈囉 (haal lo2). Whereas, "Bye" is 拜拜 (baail baai3). Both words have been adapted to the Cantonese pronunciation.



## Absolute Beginner S1

A Beer to Quench your Cantonese Thirst

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## Traditional Chinese

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小姐，唔該！  
唔？  
我要一支啤酒。  
冇問題。

## Jyutping

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siu2 ze2, m4 goi1!  
m2?  
ngo5 jiu3 jat1 zil bel zau2.  
mou5 man6 tai4.

## English

---

Excuse me, Miss?  
Hmm?  
I would like a beer.  
No problem.



2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
小姐	siu2 ze2	miss
要	jiu1	to want / to need
一	jat1	one
支	zil	(measure word for bottle)
啤酒	bel zau2	beer
冇問題	mou5 man6 tai4	no problem
先生	sin1 saang1	sir, mister
靚仔	leng3 zai2	handsome boy
靚女	leng3 nei2	pretty girl
兩	loeng5	two (2)
個	go3	(measure word)
果汁	gwo2 zap1	juice
水	seoi2	water

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

小姐，唔該借過。	siu2 ze2, m4 goi1 ze3 gwo3.	Miss, please let me through.
我要兩個pizza。	ngo5 jiu3 loeng5 go3 pizza.	I want two pizzas.
一個人嚟？	jat1 go3 jan4 lai4?	You here alone?
兩支生力啤幾錢？	loeng5 zil sang1 lik6 bel gei2 cin2?	How much are two San Miguel's?
兩支生力啤幾錢？	loeng5 zil sang1 lik6 bel gei2 cin2?	How much are two San Miguel's?
乜都有問題。	mat1 dou1 mou5 man6 tai4.	Everything's no problem.
先生，幾位？	sin1 saang1, gei2 wai2?	How many people, sir?
偉仔好靚仔。	wai5 zai2 hou2 leng3 zai2.	Tony Leung is very good-looking.
嘉玲好靚女。	gaal ling4 hou2 leng3 nei5.	Carling Lau is very good-looking.
兩位。	loeng5 wai2.	For two.
我有兩個姊妹。	ngo5 jau5 loeng5 go3 ze4 zel.	I have two older sisters.
兩杯果汁，唔該。	loeng5 bui1 gwo2 zap1, m4 goi1.	Two glasses of juice, please.
水對身體好。	seoi2 deoi3 san1 tai2 hou2.	Water is good for the body.

## Grammar Points

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The Focus of This Lesson is Asking for Something

我要一支啤酒。

ngo5 jiu3 jat1 zil bel zau2.

"I would like a beer."

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The grammar focus of this lesson is the verb "to want" (要, jiu3). You can use this to express desire, interest, or a set plan for something that you want. The sentence structure for this verb follows the familiar pattern S+V+O where 要 is the verb, and what you want is the object.

For Example:

1. 小姐，我要百威。

siu2 ze2, ngo5 jiu3 baak3 wail

"Miss, I want a Budweiser."

2. 香港啤酒好好飲。

hoeng1 gong2 bel zau2 hou2 hou2 jam2

"Hong Kong beer tastes good."

3. 我要水。

ngo5 jiu3 seoi2

"I want water."

4. 我要果汁。

ngo5 jiu3 gwo2 zap1

"I want fruit juice."

5. 我要兩個菜。

ngo5 jiu3 loeng5 go3 coi3

"I want two dishes."\*

6. 我要兩個飯。

ngo5 jiu3 loeng5 go3 faan6

"I want two bowls of rice."\*

\* Remember that Cantonese uses measure words like 個 (go3) to distinguish the object. Remember that the measure word goes after the verb and before the object.

## Cultural Insight

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Calling Out in Cantonese

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When traveling through a street in either Hong Kong or Guangdong, many roadside vendors will yell out at you 喂, 靚仔! (wai2, leng3 zai2!) – “Hey gorgeous!” just to get your attention. Another common call is 靚女 (leng3 nei5), which literally translates to “woman wearing makeup.” You might look back amusingly to see what all the commotion is about, but this kind of yelling out is just a Cantonese custom.



## Absolute Beginner S1

Logging on in Hong Kong

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## Traditional Chinese

呢度有冇wifi啊?  
有。  
點上?  
我嚟幫你。

## Jyutping

nil dou6 jau5 mou5 wifi aa3?  
jau5.  
dim2 soeng5?  
ngo5 lai4 bong1 nei5.

## English

Do you have Wi-Fi here?  
Yes.  
How do I get on?  
Let me help you.

2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
呢度	nil dok6	here
有冇	jau5 mou5	Do you have...?
點	dim2	how to
上	soeng5	to get on
上網	soeng5 mong5	to get online
嚟	lai2	come
幫	bong1	help
廁所	ci3 so2	toilet
餐廳	caan1 teng1	restaurant
房	fong2	room

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

呢度啲嘢好好食。	nil dou6 dil je5 hou2 hou2 sik6.	Food here is delicious.
你有冇時間？	nei5 jau5 mou5 si4 gaan3?	Do you have time?
呢個點用？	nil go3 dim2 jung6?	How do I use this?
呢個網站我好耐冇上嘞。	nil go3 mong5 zaam6 ngo5 hou2 loi6 mou5 soeng5 la6.	I haven't been to this website for quite a while.
我屋企可以上網。	ngo5 uk1 kei2 ho2 ji5 soeng5 mong5.	You can get online at my place.
等我嚟。	dang2 ngo5 lai4.	Let me do it.
佢幫我搞掂。	keoi5 bong1 ngo5 gaau2 dim6.	He helped me seal the deal.
佢要去廁所。	keoi5 jiu3 heoi3 ci3 so2.	He wants to go to the toilet.
餐廳喺邊？	caan1 teng1 hai2 bin1?	Where is the restaurant?
仲有冇房？	zung6 jau5 mou5 fong2?	Do you have any room left?

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 有, jau5 ("to have")

呢度有冇wifi啊？

nil dou6 jau5 mou5 wifi aa3?

"Do you have Wi-Fi here?"

The focus of this grammar section is the verb 有 (jau5) - "to have." You can use this verb to say that something exists, is in someone's possession, or is available.

For Example:

1. 我有問題。

ngo5 jau5 man6 tai4

"I have a problem."

To negate this verb, you replace 有 with 冇.

For Example:

1. 冇問題

mou5 man6 tai4

"no problem"

2. 冇網絡  
mou5 mong5 lok6  
"no Internet"
3. 冇房  
mou5 fong2  
"no room"
4. 冇啤酒  
mou5 bel zau2  
"no beer"

To ask "Do you have...", or "Is there any...", use 有冇 (jau5 mou5) followed by the object you are asking about.

For Example:

1. 有冇廁所啊?  
jau5 mou5 ci3 so2 aa3  
"Is there a toilet here?"
2. 有冇啤酒啊?  
jau5 mou5 bel zau2 aa3  
"Do you have any beer?"
3. 有冇餐廳啊?  
jau5 mou5 caan1 teng1 aa3  
"Is there a restaurant here?"

## Cultural Insight

### Finding Wireless in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a modern city with all the amenities you would expect back in the US or Europe. Wireless Internet is easily accessible in most parts of the city, especially on the island, and in most parts of Kowloon. One of the first things you will want to do when entering Hong Kong is to buy a local SIM card for your cell phone. You can easily purchase these either on the train into the territory or at the airport. This will allow you to access Wi-Fi hotspots in Hong Kong. The Internet in Hong Kong is surprisingly fast, and you don't experience the kind of Internet censorship common on the mainland of China. Facebook, Twitter, and Google applications are all accessible.



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A Lesson in Cantonese Civility

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## Traditional Chinese

---

你好。  
你好。  
你嘅啤酒。  
唔該。  
唔使客氣。

## Jyutping

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nei5 hou2。  
nei5 hou2。  
nei5 ge3 bel zau2。  
m4 goi1。  
m4 sai2 haak3 hei3。

## English

---

Hello.  
Hello.  
Your beer.  
Thank you.  
You're welcome.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
嘅	ge3	possessive particle
你嘅	nei5 ge3	your, yours
唔使客氣	m4 sai2 haak3 hei3	You're welcome.
唔該	m4 goi1	please; thank you; excuse me
唔該曬	m4 goi1 saai3	Thank you very much.
啤酒	bel zau2	beer
佢	keoi5	he, she, it
我哋	ngo5 dei6	we
你哋	nei5 dei6	you
佢哋	keoi5 dei6	they

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

我嘅單車唔見咗。	ngo5 ge3 daan1 cel m4 gin6 zo2.	My bike is missing.
呢本係唔係你嘅書?	nei5 bun2 hai6 m4 hai6 nei5 ge3 syul?	Is this your book?
唔使咁客氣。	m4 sai2 gam2 haak3 hei3.	You're most welcome.
唔該細聲啲。	m4 goi1 sai3 seng1 dil.	Please lower your volume.
真係唔該晒。	zan1 hai6 m4 goi1 saai3.	A million thanks.
兩支生力啤幾錢?	loeng5 zil sang1 lik6 bel gei2 cin2?	How much are two San Miguel's?
佢係我朋友。	keoi5 hai6 ngo5 pang4 jau5.	He is my friend.
我哋都係中國人。	ngo5 dei6 dou1 hai6 zung1 gwok3 jan4.	We are all Chinese.
你哋一齊去?	nei5 dei6 jat1 cai4 heoi3?	Are you going together?
佢哋嘅事你唔好理。	keoi5 dei6 ge3 si6 nei5 m4 hou2 lei5.	Stay away from their business.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is the Possessive Particle 嘅 (ge3)

你 嘅啤酒。

nei5 ge3 bel zau2

"Your beer."

嘅 (ge3) is a structural particle we use to show possession or ownership. The noun before 嘅 (ge3) is the owner of the object after 嘅 (ge3). For example, to say "my book" in Cantonese, connect the subject 我 (ngo5) - "I" and the object 書 (syu1) - "book" with the particle 嘅 (ge3): 我嘅書.

The word order is always as follows: owner + 嘅 (ge3) + owned. Furthermore, you can use all pronouns with the possessive particle 嘅.

Cantonese	Jyutping	"English"
我嘅	ngo5 ge3	"mine"
你嘅	nei5 ge3	"yours"
佢嘅	keoi5 ge3	"his"/"hers"/"its"
我哋嘅	ngo5 dei6 ge3	"ours"
你哋嘅	nei5 dei6 ge3	"yours" - plural
佢哋嘅	keoi5 dei6 ge3	"theirs"

When speaking about family members, we drop 嘅 (ge3). For instance, "my mother" is 我媽媽 (ngo5 maa4 maal).

For Example:

- 你嘅啤酒。  
nei5 ge3 bel zau2  
"Your beer."
- 我嘅水。  
ngo5 ge3 seoi2  
"My water."

## Cultural Insight

### Service in Hong Kong

Taking a cue from Britain, Hong Kong has a culture with a developed and sophisticated hospitality industry. This includes a custom of tipping. This is quite evident when contrasted with mainland Guangdong where tipping is unheard of and service can be hit or miss. Go to any sit-down restaurant in Hong Kong, and you will likely find a fifteen percent service charge added to your bill. In Hong Kong, the service staff is smaller and more efficient. In Guangdong, an army of waiters and waitresses fly through the restaurant filling orders as they are shouted at from across the room by impatient customers.

Given the differences in labor cost and cost of living in general, meals in Hong

Kong are more expensive. But remember, in China, you get what you pay for. The meal may be cheaper, but don't assume you will receive top-notch service. But then again, mainland China can surprise you by providing excellent service at a fraction of the cost.



## Absolute Beginner S1

## Out for a Cantonese Dinner

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## Traditional Chinese

我肚餓。  
 我都係。  
 一齊食嘢？  
 好啊。

## Jyutping

ngo5 tou5 ngo6.  
 ngo5 dou1 hai6.  
 jat1 cai4 sik6 je5?  
 hou2 a3 .

## English

I'm hungry.  
 Me too.  
 Let's go eat.  
 Okay.

2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
口渴	hau2 hot3	thirsty
肚餓	tou5 ngo6	hungry
都	dou1	also
係	hai6	to be
叻	gui6	tired
嘢	je5	thing, things
食	sik6	to eat
好	hou2	all right
一齊	jat1 cai4	together
飲	yam2	to drink

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

口渴的狗在喝泳池裡的水。	hau2 hot3 dik1 gau2 zoi6 hot3 wing6 ci4 leoi5 dik1 seoi2.	The thirsty dog is drinking from the pool.
女人餓了，她去冰箱裡找食物。	neoi5 jan2 ngo6 liu5, taal heoi3 bing1 soeng1 leoi5 zaau2 sik6 mat6.	The woman is hungry. The hungry man is looking for food in the refrigerator.
我都鍾意佢。	ngo5 dou1 zung1 ji3 keoi5.	I also like him/her/it.
佢係女仔。	keoi5 hai6 neoi5 zai2.	She is a girl.
行咗成日好拗。	haang4 zo2 seng4 jat6 hou2 gui6.	After walking for a whole day, I feel tired.
一齊食嘢。	jat1 cai4 sik6 je5.	Eat together.
一齊食嘢。	jat1 cai4 sik6 je5.	Eat together.
我好好。	ngo5 hou2 hou2.	I'm very good/well.
一齊食嘢。	jat1 cai4 sik6 je5.	Eat together.
你鍾意飲咩？	nei5 zung1 ji3 jam2 mel?	What do you like to drink?

## Grammar Points

## The Focus of This Lesson is Basic Sentence Structure

我肚餓。

ngo5 tou5 ngo6

"I'm hungry"

In Cantonese, the basic sentence pattern is as follows: subject + adverb/verb + adjective. For example, 我好肚餓 (ngo5 hou2 tou5 ngo6.) - "I'm very hungry." The adverb of degree here is 好, and this acts as "to be," linking the subject 我 and the adjective 肚餓.

You can also place verbs to connect both the subject and object.

For Example:

1. 我好肚餓。

ngo5 hou2 tou5 ngo6

"I am hungry."

2. 佢好口渴。

keoi5 hou2 hau2 hot3

"He is thirsty."

If there is both an adverb and a verb in the sentence, place the adverb in front of the verb.

For instance, subject + adverb + verb + object

For Example:

1. 我哋一齊食嘢。  
ngo5 dei6 jat1 cai4 sik6 je5  
"We eat together."
2. 我哋一齊飲嘢。  
ngo5 dei6 jat1 cai4 jam2 je5  
"We drink together."

## Cultural Insight

---

### Outside Eateries

Hong Kong is notorious for sweltering and humid summers. To beat the heat and avoid stuffy restaurants, many locals and tourists alike head outdoors to enjoy their food and cooler temperatures. Since Hong Kong is situated on the ocean, there is easy access to fresh seafood. Go to any bustling street on the Kowloon side of the territory, and you will find a vast selection of foods to choose from. The most popular and abundant beer by far in Hong Kong is San Miguel. With their original brewery based in the Philippines, San Miguel is one of the cheapest beers you can buy on the street. San Miguel is also brewed in Hong Kong by the San Miguel Brewery Hong Kong Ltd., where it has a twenty-four percent share compared to European rivals. Pick it up at a corner store or your favorite restaurant.



Absolute Beginner S1  
Help From the Cantonese Staff

8

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## Traditional Chinese

---

小姐!  
 有咩可以幫到你?  
 埋單, 唔該。  
 好。

## Jyutping

---

siu2 ze2!  
 jau5 mel ho2 ji5 bong1 dou2 nei5?  
 maai4 daan1, m4 goi1.  
 hou2.

## English

---

Miss!  
 Is there anything I can help you with?  
 Bill please.  
 Okay.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
咩	mel	what
可以	ho2 ji5	can; to allow
幫	bong1	to help
有咩	jau5 mel	Is there anything...
睇	tai2	to watch/see
做	zou6	to do; to work
埋單	maai4 daan1	to check the bill

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

---

你叫咩名?	nei5 giu3 mel meng2?	What's your name?
我哋可以一齊去。	ngo5 dei6 ho2 ji5 jat1 cai4 heoi3.	We can go together.
唔該幫下我。	m4 goi1 bong1 haa5 ngo5.	Please help me.
有咩問題?	jau5 mel man6 tai4?	Is there any problem? /What's the problem?
不如睇戲?	bat1 jyu4 tai2 hei3?	How about (we) see a movie?
最近好多嘢做。	zeoi3 gan6 hou2 dol je5 zou6.	(There's) a lot of stuff to do lately.
我嚟埋單。	ngo5 lai4 maai4 daan1.	Let me pick up the tab.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Asking Questions Using 有咩 (jau5 mel)

有咩可以幫到你?

jau5 mel ho2 ji5 bong1 dou2 nei5 ?

"Is there anything I can help you with?"

In this lesson, we will focus on two ways of asking questions in Cantonese. The first is by using the combination of 有咩 (jau5 mel) and 可以 (ho2 ji5). This functions as "Is there any..." and then the object you are asking about.

Formula: 有咩可以 + object + 啊

For Example:

1. 有咩可以食啊?  
jau5 mel ho2 ji5 sik6 aa3  
"Is there anything to eat?"
2. 有咩可以飲啊?  
jau5 mel ho2 ji5 jam2 aa3  
"Is there anything to drink?"
3. 有咩可以買啊?  
jau5 mel ho2 ji5 maai5 aa3  
"Is there anything to buy?"

Another way of asking a question in Cantonese is by using 可以. In Cantonese, an easy way to ask a question is by reduplicating the verb. In this case, we use 可唔可以 to ask "can" or "cannot?" Notice we are using the negation 唔.

For Example:

1. 你可唔可以幫我?  
nei5 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 bong1 ngo5

"Can you help me?"

2. 我哋可唔可以食嘢?

ngo5 dei6 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 sik6 je5

"Can we eat?"

3. 我哋可唔可以飲嘢?

ngo5 dei6 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 jam2 je5

"Can we drink?"

4. 我哋可唔可以埋單?

ngo5 dei6 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 maai4 daan1

"Can we get the bill?"

## Cultural Insight

---

### Customer Service in Hong Kong

---

One of the benefits that Hong Kong received under British rule was a stronger appreciation and aptitude for customer service. This is something that distinguishes the territory from its mainland brethren. Overall, the level of customer service in Hong Kong's hospitality sector is quite good. This can be attributed in some small part to the fact that Hong Kong operates on a tipping basis. But good service comes at a price. Often times in restaurants, an involuntary service charge of fifteen percent will be applied to the total cost of the bill.



## Absolute Beginner S1

## Delicious Cantonese Roast Goose

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## Traditional Chinese

呢個係咩？  
 呢個係深井燒鵝。  
 好好食啲！  
 我都好鍾意食。

## Jyutping

ni1 go3 hai6 me1?  
 ni1 go3 hai6 sam1 zeng2 siu1 ngo2.  
 hou2 hou2 sik6 wo3!  
 ngo5 dou1 hou2 zung1 ji3 sik6.

## English

What is this?  
 This is Sam Jeng roast goose.  
 It's delicious.  
 I like it a lot too.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
呢	ni1	this
呢個	ni1 go3	this one
嗰	go2	that
嗰個	go2 go3	that one
燒鵝	siu1 ngo2	roast goose
好食	hou2 sik6	delicious
鍾意	zung1 ji3	to like
出名	ceot1 ming4	famous

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

呢件衫好好睇。	nil gin6 saam1 hou2 hou2 tai2.	This clothing looks really good.
我要呢個。	ngo5 jiul nil go3.	I want this one.
嗰隻歌好好聽。	go2 zek3 gol hou2 hou2 teng1.	That song sounds really good.
嗰個人叫咩名?	go2 go3 jan4 giu3 mel meng4?	What's that person's name?
深井燒鵝遠近馳名。	sam1 zeng2 siul ngo2 jyun5 gan6 ci4 ming4.	Sam Jeng roast goose is famous far and wide.
呢度啲嘢好好食。	nil dou6 dil je5 hou2 hou2 sik6.	Food here is delicious.
我鍾意食點心。	ngo5 zung1 ji3 sik6 dim2 sam1.	I like to eat dimsum.
人怕出名豬怕壯。	jan4 paa3 ceot1 meng2 zyul paa3 zong3.	People fear getting famous, pigs fear getting fat. (Don't fly too close to the sun.)

## Grammar Points

### The Focus of This Lesson is Asking Questions

呢個係咩?

nil go3 hai6 mel?

"What is this?"

Another way to ask questions in Cantonese is by using 係咩 (hai6 mel?) - "What?" To ask a question using 係咩, you want to place the object of the sentence in front of 係咩. We see this used in the dialogue in this sentence: 呢個係咩? (nil go3 hai6 mel?) - "What is this?" The literal translation is "This is what?" so it is important to remember to place the question word 係咩 at the end of the sentence.

For Example:

1. 嗰個係咩

go2 go3 hai2 mel

"What is that?"

## Cultural Insight

### Delicious Cantonese Cuisine

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Cantonese cooking is somewhat lighter than most regional Chinese cuisine. Preparation methods usually involve stir-frying in shallow water or oil in a wok. As cooking time is short, the flavors and nutrition of the food is preserved. Vegetable and fish dishes are often steamed without the use of too much oil. Sauces made from ingredients like ginger, garlic, onion, vinegar, and sugar are complemented to enhance flavors.

Cantonese menus are long and can often confuse the diner in making a decision. There are a wide variety of dishes made from meats, poultry, fish, seafood, and vegetables for you to choose from.



Absolute Beginner S1  
Ways to Get Around Hong Kong

10

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## Traditional Chinese

我地點去啊？  
搭巴士。  
不如搭地鐵？  
都得。

## Jyutping

ngo5 dei6 dim2 heoi3 aa3?  
daap3 baal si2.  
bat1 jyu4 daap3 dei6 tit3?  
doul dak1.

## English

How do we get there?  
Let's take the bus.  
How about the subway?  
That'll also work.

2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
搭	daap3	to take (a transport)
的士	dik1 si2	taxi
車	cel	car
巴士	baal si2	bus
地鐵	dei6 tit3	subway
飛機	feil geil	airplane
不如	bat1 jyu4	how about
都得	doul dak1	They're both okay.

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

搭車搭船都可以去。	daap3 cel daap3 syun4 dou1	We can go there by car or by boat.
唔好叫人地的士佬。	ho2 ji5 heoi3. m4 hou2 giu3 jan4 dei6 dik1 si2 lou2.	Don't call people "taxi guy."
我想買部二手車。	ngo5 soeng2 maai5 bou6 ji6 sau2 cel.	I want to buy a second-hand car.
搭巴士過去都好方便。	daap3 baal si2 gwo3 heoi3 dou1 hou2 fong1 bin6.	Taking a bus there is very convenient too.
佢屋企喺地鐵站附近。	keoi5 ukl kei2 hai2 dei6 tit3 zaam6 fu6 gan6.	His house is close to the subway station.
而家飛機票唔貴。	ji4 gaal feil geil piu3 m4 gwai3.	Plane tickets now are not expensive.
不如我地去吃晚飯?	bat1 jyu4 ngo5 dei6 heoi3 hek3 maan5 faan6?	How about we go to dinner?
點都得。	dim2 dou1 dak1.	Any way works.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Making Suggestions

不如搭地鐵?

bat1 jyu4 daap3 dei6 tit3?

"How about the subway?"

Making suggestions in Cantonese is simple. By using 不如 (bat1 jyu4), you can imply that one idea is better than another proposed idea and has the meaning of "How about..." When using 不如, you do not need to include the pronoun 我哋 ("we") because it is implied. The suggestion following 不如 can be a verb, a noun, or a sentence.

Cantonese	Jyutping	"English"
不如去食嘢?	bat1 jyu4 heoi3 sik6 je5	"How about we go eat something?"
不如搭飛機?	bat1 jyu4 daap3 feil1 geil	"How about we take an airplane?"
不如搭的士?	bat1 jyu4 daap3 dik1 si2	"How about we take a taxi?"
不如我哋一齊食嘢?	bat1 jyu4 ngo5 dei6 jat1 cai4 sik6 je5	"How about eating together?"
不如蝦餃?	bat1 jyu4 haal1 gaau2	"How about shrimp dumplings?"

## Cultural Insight

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### Getting around in Hong Kong

---

Traveling within Hong Kong is convenient and fun. The layout of the Hong Kong territory is basically divided into two sections. To the south, you have the main Hong Kong Island along with other minor outlying islands, and to the north, you have the mainland territories of Kowloon. Hong Kong has an extensive network of subways that connects all parts of the city to each other. If you'd prefer to travel above ground, it is very easy to hail a taxi and get to where you need to go. The taxis drive on the left side of the road, so make sure you look right and then left before crossing the street.

One of the best ways of getting around, however, is by ferry. There are plenty of ferries that haul people from the main island and other small surrounding islands. The trip across the strait only takes around twenty minutes, which is plenty of time to take in all the sights. If you want to head up to Victoria Peak, you can take a bus up the winding mountain, take in the mountaintop scenery, and then hop on the tram that takes you back down to sea level.



## Absolute Beginner S1

## No Free Cantonese Lunch

11

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## Traditional Chinese

---

弊!  
咩事?  
我有晒cash!  
唔使驚, 我大把。

## Jyutping

---

bai6!  
me1 si6?  
ngo5 mou5 saai3 cash!  
m4 sai2 geng1, ngo5 daai6 baa2.

## English

---

Shoot!  
What?  
I ran out of cash!  
Don't worry. I've got plenty.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
弊	bai6	shoot!
咩事	me1 si6	What (thing happened)?
冇晒	mou5 saai3	to run out of
唔使	m4 sai2	no need to
驚	geng1	to be scared of
擔心	daam1 sam1	to worry
唔使驚	m4 sai2 geng1	Don't worry.
大把	daai6 baa2	to have plenty (of)

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

---

弊啦!	bai6 laa3!	Oh, shoot!
咩事?	mel si6?	What?
佢冇晒面。	keoi5 mou5 saai3 min2。	He is so embarrassed.
唔使緊張。	m4 sai2 gan2 zoengl。	Don't be nervous.
我好驚老鼠。	ngo5 hou2 geng1 lou5 syu2。	I'm scared of mice.
媽媽好擔心你。	maal maal hou2 daaml sam1 nei5。	Mom is so worried about you.
我係你身邊, 唔使驚!	ngo5 hai6 nei5 san1 bin1, m4 sai2 geng1!	Don't worry, I am by your side.
慢慢嚟, 我大把時間。	maan6 maan2 lai4, ngo5 daai6 baa2 si4 gaan3。	Take it easy, I have plenty of time.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Reviewing Basic Sentence Structure

我有晒 cash!

ngo5 mou5 saai3 cash!

"I ran out of cash!"

The basic Cantonese sentence structure follows the English pattern: Subject + Verb/Adverb + Object. A sample sentence is 我好口渴 (ngo5 hou2 hau2 hot3.) - "I'm very thirsty." In this sentence, the object of the sentence is the adjective 口渴 ("thirsty"). We connect the subject 我 to the adjective/object by the adverb 好. In this context, the adverb 好 functions as the English equivalent of "to be" and "very" combined.

More examples using the adverb 好:

1. 佢好肚餓。  
keoi5 hou2 tou5 ngo6  
"He is hungry."
2. 我好劓。  
ngo5 hou2 gui6  
"I am tired."

To negate a sentence in Cantonese, simply replace the adverb 好 with 唔 (m4).

For Example:

1. 我唔劓。  
ngo5 m4 gui6  
"I'm not tired."

We can place other verbs into our formula of Subject + Verb + Object, including 有 (jau5) - "to have," 要 (jiu3) - "to want," and 鍾意 (zung1 ji3) - "to like".

For Example:

1. 我有錢。  
ngo5 jau5 cin2  
"I have money."
2. 我要呢個。  
ngo5 jiu3 nil go3  
"I want this"
3. 我鍾意你。  
ngo5 zung1 ji3 nei5  
"I like you."

## Cultural Insight

---

### Purchasing Power in Hong Kong

---

Hong Kong is based on commerce, and it functions as an Asian financial hub. People travel from all over the world to shop in one of Hong Kong's many department stores. Customers need easy access to these goods, so the use of credit and debit cards is everywhere. Aside from being able to pay with a card, Hong Kong has colorful and interesting banknotes. Individual banks inside Hong Kong print their own money. Money from different banks will appear and feel different, sometimes having a clear, see-through portion. Coins are also quite common in Hong Kong since a large number of people take public transportation. Coins are easily distributed and collected.



## Absolute Beginner S1

Time for Cantonese

12

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## Traditional Chinese

---

你幾時得閒啊？  
下個禮拜丫。  
禮拜六？  
禮拜日。

## Jyutping

---

nei5 gei2 si4 dak1 haan4 a3?  
haa6 go3 lai5 baai3 a1.  
lai5 baai3 luk6?  
lai5 baai3 jat6.

## English

---

When will you have time?  
Next week.  
Saturday?  
Sunday.



2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
幾時	gei2 si4	when
得閒	dak1 haan4	to be available
下個	haa6 go3	next (one)
上個	soeng6 go3	last (one)
禮拜	lai5 baai3	week
星期	sing1 kei4	week
禮拜六	lai5 baai3 luk6	Saturday
禮拜日	lai5 baai3 jat6	Sunday
一	jat1	one (1)
二	ji6	two (2)
三	saam1	three (3)
四	sei3	four (4)
五	ng5	five (5)
六	luk6	six (6)

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

你幾時到? 得閒去兜風。	nei5 gei2 si4 dou3? dak1 haan4 heoi3 dau1 fung1.	When will you arrive? (When you/I) have time, go have a joyride.
下個人。	haa6 go3 jan4.	Next (person).
上個禮拜。	soeng6 go3 lai5 baai3.	Last week.
四個禮拜。	sei3 go3 lai5 baai3.	Four weeks.
四個星期。	sei3 go3 sing1 kei4.	Four weeks.
上個禮拜六。	soeng6 go3 lai5 baai3 luk6.	Last Saturday.
下個禮拜日。	haa6 go3 lai5 baai3 jat6.	Next Sunday.
一個人。	jat1 go3 jan4.	One person.
二號位。	ji6 hou6 wai2.	The position number two.
三百人。	saam1 baak3 jan4.	Three hundred people.
四個星期。	sei3 go3 sing1 kei4.	Four weeks.
俾我五蚊就得啦。	bei2 ngo5 ng5 man1 zau6 dak1 laa3.	Give me five HKD, that's fine.
我個女六歲。	ngo5 go3 nei5 luk6 sei3.	My daughter is six years old.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Talking about 幾時, gei1 si4 ("time")

你幾時得閒?

nei5 gei2 si4 dak1 haan4 ?

"When will you have time?"

When asking about a general time in Cantonese, use the word 幾時 (gei2 si4). This is a combination of the words 幾 ("how much") + 時 ("time"). When phrasing this in a question, you want to follow this pattern: Subject + 幾時 + Verb. For example, in the dialogue, we saw this sentence: 你幾時得閒? (nei5 gei2 si4 dak1 haan4?)

"When will you have time?" To ask about a specific time, use the phrase 幾點 (gei2 dim2).

Examples using 幾時:

1. 你哋幾時食飯?  
nei5 dei6 gei2 si4 sik6 faan6  
"When will you eat?"
2. 你幾時得閒?  
nei5 gei2 si4 dak1 haan4  
"When will you be available?"
3. 佢幾時到?  
keoi5 gei2 si4 dou3  
"When will he arrive?"
4. 我哋幾時走?  
ngo5 dei6 gei2 si4 zau2  
"When do we leave?"
5. 佢哋幾點到?  
keoi5 dei6 gei2 dim2 dou3  
"What time will they arrive?"

## Cultural Insight

---

### Counting the Days in Cantonese

---

While the handful of tones and countless characters may prove daunting to the fresh student learning Cantonese, at least one thing won't make your head spin. That is the weekly calendar. In Cantonese, instead of having individual names for days, the days are counted off from one to seven. "One" being Monday, and "seven" being Sunday. To say a day, simply put the word for "week" (禮拜) followed by the number of the day. For example, Thursday will be 禮拜四 (lai5 baai3 sei3), or "day four." We use the same number scheme for months also. Instead of placing the number after the week, you place the calendar number of the month before 月 (jyut6). So for example, March will become 三月 (saam1 jyut6), or the "third month."



## Absolute Beginner S1

## Crashing and Burning

13

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## Traditional Chinese

嗨，靚女！  
咩事啊？  
你電話幾多號啊？  
我有電話。

## Jyutping

haail, leng3 neoi5!  
mel si6 a3?  
nei5 din6 waa2 gei2 dol hou6 a3?  
ngo5 mou5 din6 waa2.

## English

Hi, gorgeous.  
What?  
What's your phone number?  
I don't have a phone.

2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
打	daa2	to dial; to hit
電話	din6 waa6	telephone
手機	sau2 gei1	cell phone
號碼	hou6 maa5	number
屋企	uk1 kei5	home
幾多	gei2 dol	How many? (literally)
七	cat1	seven (7)
八	baat3	eight (8)
九	gau2	nine (9)
零	ling4	zero (0)

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

打俾我。 有冇我電話?	daa2 bei2 ngo5. jau5 mou5 ngo5 din6 waa2?	Call me. Are there any phone calls for me?
我想買部新手機。	ngo5 soeng2 maai5 bou6 san1 sau2 gei1.	I want to buy a new cell phone.
你屋企號碼幾多?	nei5 uk1 kei2 hou6 maa5 gei2 dol?	What's your room number?
佢屋企電話幾多?	keoi5 uk1 kei2 din6 waa2 gei2 dol?	What's his landline?
總共幾多人啊?	zung2 gung6 gei2 dol jan4 aa3?	How many people all together?
呢條裙四百七十蚊。	ni1 tiu4 kwan4 sei3 baak3 cat1 sap6 man1.	This skirt is 470 HKD.
佢住喺八樓。	keoi5 zyu6 hai2 baat3 lau2.	He lives on the eighth floor.
佢爸爸一九八九年嚟美國。	keoi5 baa4 baal jat1 gau2 baat3 gau2 nin4 lai4 mei5 gwok3.	His dad came to America in 1989.
我最愛嘅電影角色係占士邦零七!	ngo5 zeoi3 oi3 ge3 din6 jing2 gok3 sik1 hai6 zim1 si6 bong1 ling4 ling4 cat1!	My favorite movie star is James Bond - 007!

3

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 幾多, gei1 dol ("How Many")

你電話幾多號啊?

nei5 din6 waa2 gei2 dol hou6 a3?

"What's your phone number?"

In Cantonese, when asking for someone's phone number, use 幾多號 (gei2 dol hou6) - "How many number?"

"What's your phone number?" in Cantonese is 你電話幾多號啊? (nei5 din6 waa2 gei2 dol hou6 a3), this translates literally as "Your phone number how many number?"

Here are some more examples using 幾多:

1. 有幾多人?  
jau5 gei2 dol jan4  
"How many people (are there)?"
2. 有幾多個?  
jau5 gei2 dol go3  
"How many?"
3. 我哋屋企電話幾多號?  
ngo5 dei6 uk1 kei2 din6 waa2 gei2 dol hou6  
"What's our home phone number?"
4. 佢手機幾多號?  
keoi5 sau2 gei1 gei2 dol hou6  
"What's his cell number?"

## Cultural Insight

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### Cell Phones in Hong Kong

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Cell phones are easy to use and buy in Hong Kong. You can use any international cell phone as long as it has a SIM card slot in the phone. You can easily purchase a SIM card on a pre-paid basis without the hassle of contracts. Since Hong Kong has preferential trade policies and low tariffs, you can purchase international brands of electronics and cell phones at a discounted price. You can buy an iPhone at a thirty to forty percent discount in price from the same model in mainland China.



## Absolute Beginner S1

## Out for a Cantonese Movie

14

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## Traditional Chinese

一齊睇戲啊?  
 咩戲啊?  
 2012。  
 好啊。

## Jyutping

jat1 cai4 tai2 hei3 aa1?  
 mel hei3 aa3?  
 ji6 ling4 jat1 ji6。  
 hou2 aa3。

## English

Let's go see a movie?  
 What movie?  
 "2012."  
 Sounds good.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
想	soeng2	to want
睇戲	tai2 hei3	to watch a movie
行街	hang4 gaai1	to walk in the street (literally)
食飯	sik6 faan6	to have a meal
飲茶	jam2 caa4	to have Cantonese brunch
飲嘢	jam2 je5	to have a drink
買嘢	maai5 je5	to go shopping
兜風	dau1 fung1	to have a joyride

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

我想飲酒。	ngo5 soeng2 jam2 zau2.	I want to drink alcohol.
不如睇戲?	bat1 jyu4 tai2 hei3?	How about seeing a movie?
男人唔鍾意行街。	naam4 jan2 m4 zung1 ji3 hang4 gaail.	Men don't like shopping.
今晚去餐廳食飯。	gam1 maan5 heoi3 caan1 tengl sik6 faan6.	Tonight (I'll) eat at a restaurant.
我同爺爺去飲茶。	ngo5 tung4 je4 je2 heoi3 jam2 caa4.	I have Cantonese brunch with my grandpa.
今晚去飲嘢啦!	gam1 maan5 heoi3 jam2 je5 laal!	Let's go drink tonight!
女仔鍾意買嘢。	nei5 zai2 zung1 ji3 maa5 je5.	Girls like shopping.
得閒去兜風。	dak1 haan4 heoi3 dau1 fung1 。	(When you/I) have time, go have a joyride.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is Comparing 想 and 要 (soeng2 and jiu1)

一齊睇戲啊?

jat1 cai4 tai2 hei3 aal?

"Let's go see a movie?"

In previous lessons, we have covered the verb for "to want" (要, jiu3). You can negate this verb by adding 唔 to make 唔要. If you want to ask someone if he or she wants something, you can reduplicate the verb: 要唔要 (jiu3 m4 jiu3). There is another verb in Cantonese that is similar to yet different from 要. This verb is 想 (soeng2). While this verb also functions as "to want," it can also mean "to think," or "to wish." You can also reduplicate this verb as in 想唔想 (soeng2 m4 soeng2) - "to think or not to think," "to feel or not to feel".

For Example:

1. 你想唔想食飯?

nei5 soeng2 m4 soeng2 sik6 faan6

"Do you want to have dinner?"

Remember that you can replace 想 with 要: 要唔要一齊食飯 (jiu3 m4 jiu3 jat1 cai4 sik6 faan6). The meaning is still the same but is a little more direct.

要 connotes more of a set plan, whereas 想 implies a desire for something that is not quite concrete.

## Cultural Insight

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### Hong Kong Film Industry

The Cantonese film industry is a hotbed of artistic talent and creativity for all of Asia. Hong Kong functions as a filmmaking hub for the greater Chinese speaking world due to the higher degree of economic and political freedom when compared with the mainland. The Hong Kong film industry is heavily commercialized with a highly corporate structure, mainly making movies that are crowd pleasers. Movie stars are groomed from TV farm leagues, and many pop stars enjoy acting careers and vice-versa.

Hong Kong films are relatively low budget when compared with American movies. Most budgets will cost around one million USD, while a Jackie Chan or Stephen Chow movie may cost around twenty million USD. Dubbing is one of the most recognizable traits of earlier Hong Kong films. To save time and money, films were shot without sound and dubbing, which would be added in later, sometimes without the original actors' voices. This worked well in a couple of ways because films could easily have another language added in for export.

Another feature of Hong Kong films is the subtitling of all movies. This was a result of a 1963 law put in place by the British government to keep an eye on political content. The original law was to subtitle into English, but at the same time, Chinese subtitles were added, which added to the mobility of movies throughout the Chinese speaking diasporas.

By the end of the 1970s, Golden Harvest studio has cemented its status as Hong Kong's premier film studio, pioneering new ground in Kung Fu movies and signing new talents like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan.

By the 1990s, Hong Kong's film industry had stagnated due to falling ticket prices and the Asian financial crisis along with the handover to mainland China in 1997. Currently, Hong Kong films are finding a large market in mainland China's cinemas. Box office hits like *Overheard* (2009) are cementing Hong Kong's staying power in the Asian movie market.



Absolute Beginner S1  
Crashing and Burning: Part 2

15

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## Traditional Chinese

嗨，靚女！  
咩事？  
得唔得閒，飲杯嘢？  
Sorry，我趕時間。

## Jyutping

haail, leng3 neoi5!  
mel si6?  
dak1 m4 dak1 haan4, jam2 buil je5?  
Sorry, ngo5 gon2 si4 gaan3.

## English

Hey pretty girl  
What's wrong?  
Do you have time? Fancy a drink?  
Sorry, I'm in a rush.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
得閒	dak1 haan4	to be available
趕時間	gon2 si4 gaan3	to be in a rush
食餐飯	sik6 caan1 faan6	to have a meal
飲杯嘢	jam2 buil je5	to have a drink
睇部戲	tai2 bou6 hei3	to watch a movie
忙	mong4	busy
有時間	jau5 si4 gaan3	to have time
冇時間	mou5 si4 gaan3	not to have time

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

得閒去兜風。	dak1 haan4 heoi3 dau1 fung1.	(When you/I) have time, go have a joyride.
唔好意思我趕時間。	m4 hou2 ji3 sil ngo5 gon2 si4 gaan3.	Sorry, I'm in a rush.
有冇時間食餐飯?	jau5 mou5 si4 gaan1 sik6 caan1 faan6?	Are you available to have a meal?
飲杯嘢好貴!	jam2 buil je5 hou2 gwai3!	So expensive for a drink!
有時間一齊睇部戲?	jau5 si4 gaan3 jat1 cai4 tai2 bou6 hei3?	Have time to go to a movie together?
忙咩啊?	mong4 mel aa3?	What are you busy with?
飲水都有時間。	jam2 seoi2 dou1 mou5 si4 gaan3.	I don't even have the time to drink water.

## Grammar Points

### The Focus of This Lesson is Measure Words

飲杯嘢?

jam2 buil je5?

"Fancy a drink?"

You use measure words in Cantonese to specify which type of object you are talking about. Just as English says "A pair of shoes," or a "bottle of water," Cantonese has a similar concept that applies a measure word to each object.

In Cantonese, we use this formula: Verb + Measure Word + Object.

There are many measure words, but the most common measure word by far is 個 (go3).

If you find yourself in a situation where you can't remember the exact measure word, you can simply use 個, and no one will think twice.

Some other common measure words include:

1. 支 (zil)  
"bottle"
2. 杯 (buil)  
"cup"
3. 餐 (caan1)  
"meal"

For Example:

1. 一支啤酒  
jat1 zil bel zau2

- "a bottle of beer"
2. 一支水  
jat1 zil sei2  
"a bottle of water"
3. 一餐飯  
jat1 caan1 faan6  
"one meal"
4. 兩餐飯  
loeng5 caan1 faan6  
"two meals"
5. 幾餐飯  
gei2 caan1 faan6  
"a couple of meals"

## Cultural Insight

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### Out on the Town in Hong Kong

There are plenty of options for entertainment when the sun goes down in Hong Kong, along with plenty of ways to spend money. Lan Kwai Fong is the icon of nightlife in Hong Kong. From here, you can experience restaurants, pubs, and bars in Hong Kong's trendiest area. Locals come here to relax and socialize, while tourists enjoy the variety of bands and international spirits.

Also on the island, the streets of Wan Chai gained notoriety in the 1940s as Western service men descended on the bars during their R&R. The section has since lost its stigma of being a Mecca of debauchery and hedonism and now enjoys a tamer existence. Sports bars and pubs line the streets with heavy attendance on the weekend, enjoying live cover bands singing crowd pleasers.

For a more relaxed evening focused on eating and shopping, head to Tsim Sha Tsui to sample the local seafood and to pick up bargains on apparel and accessories. This section comes alive at night when outdoor markets open up and restaurants seat guests outside in the street.



Absolute Beginner S1  
How About a Cup of Coffee?

16

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## Traditional Chinese

---

嗨，靚女！  
 點啊，靚仔。  
 得唔得閒，飲杯咖啡？  
 好啊。

## Jyutping

---

haai1 leng3 nei5!  
 dim2 aa3, leng3 zai2.  
 dak1 m4 dak1 haan4, jam2 bui1 gaal1 fei1?  
 hou2 aa3.

## English

---

Hi, pretty girl.  
 What's up, pretty guy?  
 Do you have time? Let's have a cup of coffee?  
 Sounds good.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
咖啡	gaa3 fei1	coffee
男朋友	naam4 pang4 jau5	boyfriend
女朋友	nei5 pang4 jau5	girlfriend
茶	caa4	tea
紅酒	hung4 zau2	red wine
白酒	baak6 zau2	white wine
去	heoi3	to go
嚟	lai4	to come

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

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呢度嘅咖啡好正。	nil dou6 ge3 gaa3 fel hou2 zeng3.	The coffee here is awesome.
我男朋友係老師。	ngo5 naam4 pang4 jau5 hai6 lou5 sil.	My boyfriend is a teacher.
呢個係我女朋友。	nil go3 hai6 ngo5 nei5 pang4 jau5.	This is my girlfriend.
我爸爸鍾意飲功夫茶。	ngo5 baa4 baal zung1 ji3 jam2 gung1 ful caa4.	My father likes to drink Kung Fu tea.
我要一支紅酒。	ngo5 jiu3 jat1 zil hung4 zau2.	I'd like a bottle of red wine.
我要嗰支白酒。	ngo5 jiu3 go2 zil baak6 zau2.	I'd like that bottle of white wine.
你去唔去？	nei5 heoi3 m4 heoi3?	Will you go?
我嚟幫你。	ngo5 lai4 bong1 nei5.	Let me help you.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 去, heoi3 ("to go")

飲杯咖啡？

jam2 buil gaal fel?

Let's have a cup of coffee?

The verb 去 (heoi3) - "to go" is usually combined with other verbs to mean "to go...and do something." The second verb usually takes an object.

The formula to use is : 去 + Verb + Object

For Example:

1. 去食飯  
heoi3 sik6 faan6  
"to go eat"
2. 去飲嘢  
heoi3 jam2 je5  
"to go for a drink"
3. 去飲茶  
heoi3 jam2 caa4  
"to go for some tea"
4. 去睇戲  
heoi3 tai2 hei3  
"to go watch a movie"
5. 去行街

heoi3 haang4 gaail

"to go for a walk on the street"

6. 去飲咖啡

heoi3 jam2 gaal fel

"to go drink coffee"

## Cultural Insight

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### Coffee Shops and Milk Tea in Hong Kong

---

The large population of expats in Hong Kong has created a taste for good coffee. Now, one third of Hong Kong's residents buy ready-to-drink coffee outside the home, according to a 2006 survey. You can find an array of quality and value-priced coffee throughout the territory, especially on the island. Along with coffee, many of these cafes sell gourmet sandwiches, salads, pastas, and baked goods. In Hong Kong, Starbucks coffee is popular along with Pacific coffee. Aside from coffee, "milk tea," known as dai pai dong, stands as a traditional alternative to quench that Cantonese sweet tooth. It consists of black tea sweetened with evaporated milk and is usually part of an afternoon meal in Hong Kong tea culture. The key feature of Hong Kong-style milk tea is that a sackcloth bag is used to filter the tea leaves. However, any other strainer may be used to filter the tea.



Absolute Beginner S1  
Bargaining in the Cantonese Market

17

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Jyutping	2
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## Traditional Chinese

呢個幾錢？  
 一百蚊。  
 太貴喇。  
 五十。

---

## Jyutping

ni1 go3 gei2 cin2?  
 jat1 baak3 man1.  
 taai3 gwai3 laa3.  
 ng5 sap6.

---

## English

How much is this?  
 One hundred HKD.  
 Too expensive.  
 Fifty HKD.

2

---

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
幾錢	gei2 cin2	How much...?
蚊	man1	man (hkd currency)
講價	gong2 gaa3	to bargain
貴	gwai3	expensive
平/便	peng4	cheap
買	maai5	to buy
賣	maai6	to sell
太	taai3	too

---

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

嗰個幾錢?	go2 go3 gei2 cin2?	How much is that?
兩蚊一個。	loeng5 man1 jat1 go3.	Two HKD each.
冇得講價。	mou5 dak1 gong2 gaa3.	No bargaining.
咁貴?	gam3 gwai3?	That expensive?
平啲啦。	peng4 dil laal.	Please lower the price.
我買。	ngo5 maa15.	I'll buy it.
唔賣。	m4 maa16	I'm not selling it.
太好啦!	taai3 hou2 laal!	So great!

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 太, taai3 ("too..")

太貴喇。

taai3 gwai3 laal.

"Too expensive."

Cantonese uses the adverb 太, meaning "excessive" or "to a high degree." You place this adverb in front of the adjective you want to modify. An example from the dialogue is 太貴喇 (taai3 gwai3 laal) - "too expensive". Remember to add 喇 after the adjective for dramatic effect. You can add a subject to the beginning of the sentence, but it is not mandatory. If you decide to omit the subject, make sure that it is clear what you are describing.

Formula: 太 + Adjective + 喇

For Example:

1. 太好了!  
taai3 hou2 liu5  
"That's great!"
2. 呢個太貴!  
ni1 go3 taai3 gwai3  
"This is too expensive!"
3. 呢個太大!  
ni1 go3 taai3 daai6  
"This is too big!"
4. 我唔可以食, 太熱啦!  
ngo5 m4 ho2 ji5 sik6 taai3 jit6 laa3  
"I can't eat it. It's too hot!"

## Cultural Insight

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### Shopping in the Hong Kong Market

---

Hong Kong offers a veritable paradise for shopaholics, and stands as a centerpiece of Hong Kong's culture of consumerism. Standing at the crossroads of mainland China's factories and the West's appetite for consumption, Hong Kong offers anything and everything under the sun at a value. Hong Kong's integrated city offers shopping at both high-end malls and small side streets full of vendors, both in a stone's throw from each other. Nathan Road and Tsim Sha Tsui are two of the biggest areas in Kowloon to do your bargain shopping on. In addition to finding bargains, some bargains may find you. Indian and Pakistani immigrants will stand on the street soliciting suits, watches, and sunglasses at a discount. For locals on the island, the place to go find big names, small boutiques, and bargain stalls, all in a tight cluster is Causeway Bay. The main strip is located outside the MTR exit, with buildings on each side of the road offering multiple stories of restaurants and shops.



Absolute Beginner S1  
It's Quitting Time in Hong Kong!

18

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## Traditional Chinese

而家幾點？  
五點半。  
夠鐘收工。  
走啦。

## Jyutping

ji4 gaal gei2 dim2?  
ng5 dim2 bun3.  
gau3 zung1 saul gung1.  
zau2 laal.

## English

What time is it now?  
Half past five.  
It's time to leave work.  
Let's go.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
而家	ji6 gaal	now
幾點	gei2 dim2	what time
半	bun3	half
夠鐘	gau3 zung1	it's time
收工	saul gung1	to leave work
開工	hoil gung1	to start work
走	zau2	to leave, to walk
十一	sap6 jat1	eleven
十二	sap6 ji6	twelve

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

我而家就要! 幾點收工?	ngo5 ji6 gaal zau6 jiu3. gei2 dim2 saul gung1?	I want it now! What time (do you) get off work?
十二點半。 夠鐘收工。 夠鐘收工。 夠鐘開工。 一齊走啦。 十一點半左右你有可能見到佢 。	sap6 ji6 dim2 bun3. gau3 zung1 saul gung1. gau3 zung1 saul gung1 。 gau3 zung1 hoil gung1. jat1 cai4 zau2 laal. sap6 jat1 dim2 bun3 zo2 jau2 nei5 jau5 ho2 nang4 gin3 dou3 keoi5 。	12: 30 Time to leave work. Time to leave work. Time to start work. Let's go together. You might catch her at about half past eleven.
十二除六得二。	sap6 ji6 ceoi4 luk6 dak1 ji6。	Six goes into twelve twice.

## Grammar Points

## The Focus of This Lesson is Time Expressions

五點半。

ng5 dim2 bun3.

"Half past five"

When talking about time, the numbers one to twelve are used primarily. The method we use for telling time is very similar to how a clock works using numbers in Cantonese that correspond to the numbers on an hour and minute-hand clock.

To say what time it is, use the number (1-12) + 點 = \_\_ o'clock.

For Example:

1. 10:00 = 十點 sap6 dim2

To say "half past," use the number (1-12) + 點半 = half past \_\_.

For Example:

1. 9:30 = 九點半 gau2 dim2 bun3

To say a specific hour and minute, use number (1-12) + number (1-12) =.

For Example:

1. 4:15 = 四點三 sei3 dim2 saam1

Notice that 三 corresponds to the clock and indicates "fifteen minutes."



To say a little past some hour, for example, 4:03, use = 四點多小小 sei3 dim2 do1 siu2 siu2 ("a little past four o'clock")

Special Note: When talking about 2:00 or 2:30 = 兩點 loeng5 dim2 or 兩點半 loeng5 dim2 bun3 (not 二點 ji6 dim2).

## Cultural Insight

### Working in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is regarded as the gateway into the Chinese market and has the advantages of both transparency and rule of law. Many multinational companies have their China headquarters in Hong Kong with their manufacturing and back offices across the border. In addition, many mainland Chinese companies tend to register in Hong Kong due to simpler and clearer rules.

In Hong Kong, the working week is a little longer with averages around fifty hours per week. Some differences in the work place include handing and accepting business cards with both hands and having the boss foot the entire bill for any entertainment function, which hosts employees or clients.

Many visitors holding a foreign passport can enjoy a visa-free visit of 14 to 180 days depending on your nationality. Visitors, however, are not allowed by law to take up employment or to enter school as a student without a proper visa. To obtain a working permit, the Immigration Department will look at a few key areas including educational background and whether or not the Hong Kong economy is in demand of the specific skill area. The processing time for work permits is between six and eight weeks. All Hong Kong residents require a Hong Kong ID card.



## Absolute Beginner S1

Lightning Fast Cantonese Language Proficiency

19

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## Traditional Chinese

---

你廣東話講得好好哦!  
 邊度係啊!  
 你學咗幾耐?  
 兩個鐘頭。

## Jyutping

---

nei5 gwong2 dung1 waa2 gong2 dak1 hou2 hou2 ngo4!  
 bin1 dou6 hai6 aa3!  
 nei5 hok6 zo2 gei2 loi6?  
 loeng5 go3 zung1 tau4.

## English

---

Your Cantonese is really good.  
 No, it isn't.  
 How long have you been learning?  
 Two hours.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
廣東話	gwong2 dung1 waa2	Cantonese language
咗	zo2	-ed (past tense suffix)
邊度	bin1 dou6	where
呢度	ni1 dok6	here
嗰度	go2 dou6	there
幾耐	gei2 noi6	how long
鐘頭	zung1 tau4	hour

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

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我識講廣東話。	ngo5 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2.	I (know how to) speak Cantonese.
你識唔識講廣東話?	nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2?	Do you (know how to) speak Cantonese?
去咗邊度?	heoi3 zo2 bin1 dou6?	Where did (you) go?
去咗邊度?	heoi3 zo2 bin1 dou6?	Where did (you) go?
呢度啲嘢好好食。	ni1 dou6 dil je5 hou2 hou2 sik6.	Food here is delicious.
嗰度好靚。	go2 dou6 hou2 leng3.	It's beautiful over there.
幾耐到?	gei2 noi6 dou3?	How long (does it take) to get there?
兩個鐘頭。	loeng5 go3 zung1 tau4.	Two hours.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is the Past Tense Suffix 咗 (zo2)

你學咗幾耐?

nei5 hok6 zo2 gei2 loi6

"How long have you been learning?"

In Cantonese, we don't conjugate verbs as in English. Rather, we place a specific character after a verb to show that the action took place in the past.

To indicate that you have already done an action, simply use this formula: verb + 咗 = past tense

For Example:

- 學咗  
hok6 zo2  
"studied"
- 食咗  
sik6 zo2  
"ate"
- 飲咗  
jam2 zo2  
"drank"
- 做咗  
zou6 zo2  
"did"
- 走咗  
zau2 zo2

"left"

6. 嚟咗  
lai4 zo2  
"came"

Complete sentences using the past tense marker 咗:

1. 我食咗。  
ngo5 sik6 zo2  
"I ate."
2. 佢走咗。  
keoi5 zau2 zo2  
"He left."
3. 佢嚟咗。  
keoi5 lai4 zo2  
"He came."
4. 我飲咗水。  
ngo5 jam2 zo2 seoi2  
"I drank some water."
5. 你哋做咗咩?  
nei5 dei6 zou6 zo2 mei  
"What did you guys do?"
6. 你學咗幾耐?  
nei5 hok6 zo2 gei2 loi6  
"How long have you been studying?"
7. 我學咗兩個鐘頭。  
ngo5 hok6 zo2 loeng5 go3 zung1 tau4  
"I've studied for two hours."

## Cultural Insight

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### Learning Cantonese

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Language learning opportunities are in the eye of the beholder. Unlike many languages, Cantonese is unique in the fact that a large population of native Cantonese speakers exist all around the world due to immigration. Throughout Europe, the United States, and Canada, China towns and small Chinese communities alike exist. Walk into any Chinese takeout restaurant and you will likely find a Cantonese speaker. If not a Cantonese speaker, at least someone who can help you with your Chinese characters.

Cantonese is blessed with a plethora of movies, songs, and television shows in Cantonese. You can practice natural, native-level Cantonese in the comfort of your own home on your computer. Spending time studying Chinese history and culture will give you topics to discuss with your language partner.

If you happen to live in Hong Kong or Guangdong, every day is a language lesson. Interacting with locals and repeated speaking practice is a fast track to better fluency.



## Absolute Beginner S1

Effortless Cantonese

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## Traditional Chinese

我學緊廣東話。  
 係咩？  
 你可唔可以同我講廣東話？  
 冇問題。

## Jyutping

ngo5 hok6 gan2 gwong2 dung1 waa2.  
 hai6 mel?  
 nei5 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 tung4 ngo5 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2?  
 mou5 man6 tai4 .

## English

I'm learning Cantonese.  
 Really?  
 Can you talk to me in Cantonese?  
 No problem.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
學	hok6	to learn
溫書		to study
緊	gan2	-ing
廣東話	gwong2 dung1 waa2	Cantonese language
英文	jing1 man2	English
係咩	hai6 mel	Really
國語	gwok3 jyu5	Mandarin
講	gong2	to speak
傾	king1	to talk

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

我學過跳舞。	ngo5 hok6 gwo3 tiu3 mou5.	I've learned dancing.
我溫緊書。	ngo5 wan1 gan2 syu1.	I'm studying.
我溫緊書。	ngo5 wan1 gan2 syu1.	I'm studying.
我識講廣東話。	ngo5 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2.	I (know how to) speak Cantonese.
你識唔識講廣東話?	nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2?	Do you (know how to) speak Cantonese?
你識唔識講英文?	nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gong2 jing1 man2?	Do you speak English?
係咩?	hai6 mei?	really?
我識講國語。	ngo5 sik1 gong2 gwok3 jyu5.	I can speak Mandarin.
唔該講多次。	m4 goi1 gong2 dol ci3.	Can you repeat that please?
你識唔識講廣東話?	nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2?	Do you speak Cantonese?
下次再傾。	haa6 ci3 zoi3 king1.	Talk to you next time!

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is the Present Continuous Tense Suffix 緊 (gan2)

我學緊廣東話。

ngo5 hok6 gan2 gwong2 dung1 waa2

"I'm learning Cantonese."

In Cantonese, we don't conjugate verbs as in English. Rather, we place a specific character after a verb to show that the action is taking place right now.

To indicate that you are doing an action, simply use this formula: verb + 緊 = present continuous tense

For Example:

1. 學緊  
hok6 gan2  
"learning"
2. 食緊  
sik6 gan2  
"eating"
3. 飲緊

- jam2 gan2  
"drinking"
4. 做緊  
zou6 gan2  
"doing"
5. 行緊  
haang4 gan2  
"walking"
6. 嚟緊  
lai4 gan2  
"coming"

Complete sentences using the present continuous tense marker 緊:

1. 我食緊。  
ngo5 sik6 gan2  
"I'm eating."
2. 佢嚟緊。  
heoi5 lai4 gan2  
"He is coming."
3. 我飲緊。  
ngo5 jam2 gan2  
"I'm drinking."
4. 你哋做緊咩?  
nei5 dei4 zou6 gan2 mel  
"What are you guys doing?"
5. 你學緊咩?  
nei5 hok6 gan2 mel  
"What are you learning?"
6. 我學緊廣東話。  
ngo5 hok6 gan2 gwong2 dung1 waa2  
"I'm learning Cantonese."

## Cultural Insight

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### Speaking Cantonese with Locals

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Living in a Cantonese-speaking area is a great resource to learn the language. Everyone around you is a language teacher! One of the things you may find, however, is that the language taught in a traditional textbook is a world away from how casual native speakers talk with one another. Eavesdropping on a conversation can be like solving a puzzle: trying to pick out the words you already know, while trying to construct an idea of what the entire conversation is about.

Interaction is key, and you will find people from every walk of life literally walking down the street. Most Cantonese people are very eager to engage in a conversation with a non-native speaker but remember: a) you will probably sound funny to them, and b) they have probably had few if any chances to interact with a "westerner."

Spend some time hanging around a street game of Chinese checkers or chatting with your cab driver. You'll find your spoken Cantonese and listening comprehension improving dramatically. Don't confine it just to your language partner in safe territory. Remember to push the boundaries.



Absolute Beginner S1  
Slowing Down the Cantonese

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## Traditional Chinese

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唔好意思。  
咩事？  
我聽唔明啊。  
咁...  
你可唔可以講慢啲啊？  
冇問題。

## Jyutping

---

m4 hou2 ji3 sil.  
me1 si6?  
ngo5 teng1 m4 ming4 a3.  
gam2...  
nei5 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 gong2 maan6 di1 a3?  
mou5 man6 tai4.

## English

---

Excuse me.  
What's the matter?  
I don't understand.  
So...  
Can you slow it down a bit?  
No problem.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
聽唔明	ting1 m4 ming4	not to understand
咁	gam2	so
慢	maan6	slow
講	gong2	to speak
快	faai3	fast
勤力	kan4 lik6	diligent
啲	dil	-er

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

我聽唔明。 咁... 唔該講慢啲。	ngo5 ting1 m4 ming4. gam2... m4 goi1 gong2 maan6 dil .	I don't understand. So... Can you speak slowly please?
行慢啲。 唔該講多次。 你識唔識講廣東話?	haang4 maan6 dil. m4 goi1 gong2 dol ci3 . nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gong2 gwong2 dung1 waa2?	Walk slower. Can you repeat that please? Do you speak Cantonese?
講快啲。 勤力啲。 唔該慢啲講多次。	gong2 faai3 dil. kan4 lik6 dil. m4 goi1 maan6 dil gong2 dol ci3 .	Speak faster. (Work) harder! Can you repeat again, slowly please?
行慢啲。 唔該細聲啲。	haang4 maan6 dil. m4 goi1 sai3 seng1 dil.	Walk slower. Please lower your volume.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 啲, dil (“-er”)

你可唔可以講慢啲?

nei5 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 gong2 maan6 dil?

“Can you slow it down a bit?”

In Cantonese, the character 啲 (dil) modifies adjectives and verbs and functions as the English equivalent of “-er.” For example, the Cantonese words for “fast” (快) and “slow” (慢) turn into “faster” (快啲, faai3 dil) and “slower” (慢啲, maan6 dil). Notice that the 啲 directly follows the adjective or verb. We place

adjectives that modify verbs behind the verb.

Formula: Verb + Adjective + 啲

For Example:

1. 食慢啲。  
sik6 maan6 dil  
"Eat slower."
2. 飲慢啲。  
jam2 maan6 dil  
"Drink slower."
3. 行快啲。  
haang4 faai3 dil  
"Go faster."
4. 勤力啲。  
kan4 lik6 dil  
"Work harder."

You can negate 啲 by placing 唔好 before the verb/adjective phrase.

For Example:

1. 唔好講慢啲。  
m4 ho2 gong2 maan6 dil  
"Don't speak slower."

In the dialogue, we used the grammar pattern 可唔可以 ("can or cannot") in conjunction with 啲.

For Example:

1. 你可唔可以講慢啲?  
nei5 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 gong2 maan6 dil  
"Can you speak slower?"

## Cultural Insight

### Cultural Misunderstandings

One of the biggest hurdles in living and working in both Hong Kong and Guangdong are not only the linguistic differences but the cultural differences as well. While Westerners can be given a free pass on many faux pas, there are a few proactive steps you can take to avoid stepping in cultural pot holes. The first is the handshake. There is no need to bow in Chinese culture and oftentimes a handshake will suffice. You may notice that by American and European standards, a Chinese handshake is rather limp. The thumbs-up is quite ubiquitous

in Hong Kong and mainland Guangdong, meaning "excellent!" You won't get too far with high fives though. You may also notice that many Hong Kong Chinese who do business with foreigners will use a "Western" name that is easier for them to remember and pronounce. These names are often generic and easy to pronounce, like "Eric," "Mike," or "Bill."

Gift giving is part and parcel of doing business in Hong Kong. It helps establish and maintain relationships. Gifts are always exchanged between business associates at Christmas and the Chinese New Year. Usually a red envelope with money inside is presented at both the Chinese New Year's and weddings. When giving and accepting gifts, use both hands. Gifts should be reciprocated.

Entertaining is a critical part of doing business in Hong Kong. Just like gifts, meals should also be reciprocated. Chinese tables are round and will have a "lazy Susan" in the middle so that the food can be distributed evenly. The guest of honor will sit furthest from the entrance while the host will sit closest to the entrance so they can better deal with wait staff.



Absolute Beginner S1  
It Runs in the Cantonese Family

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## Traditional Chinese

佢係邊個嚟咖?  
我大佬。  
好似劉德華嘅!  
就係佢啊。

## Jyutping

keoi5 hai6 bin1 go3 lai4 gaa3?  
ngo5 daai6 lou2.  
keoi5 hou2 ci5 lau4 dak1 waa4 bo3!  
zau6 hai6 keoi5 aa6.

## English

Who is he?  
My older brother.  
He looks a lot like Andy Lau.  
He is.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
似	ci5	to look like
邊個	bin1 go3	who
邊個黎駕	bin1 go3 lai4 gaa3	who
媽媽	maal maal	mother
爸爸	baa4 baal	father
大佬	daai6 lou2	older brother
細佬	sai3 lou2	younger brother
家姐	gaal zel	older sister
細妹	sai3 mui6	younger sister
老婆	lou5 po4	wife
老公	lou5 gung1	husband

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

你好似我一個朋友。	nei5 hou2 ci5 ngo5 jat1 go3 pang4 jau5.	You look like a friend of mine.
邊個?	bin1 go3	Who?
邊個嚟咖?	bin1 go3 lai4 gaa3?	Who is he?
媽媽唔得閒。	maa4 maal m4 dak1 haan4.	Mom's busy.
你爸爸幾歲?	nei5 baa4 baal gei2 seoi3	How old is your father?
我有兩個大佬。	ngo5 jau5 loeng5 go3 daai6 lou2.	I have two older brothers.
我係佢細佬。	ngo5 hai6 keoi5 sai3 lou2.	I 'm his younger brother.
呢個係我家姐。	nei1 go3 hai6 ngo5 gaal zel.	This is my older sister.
佢有兩個細妹。	keoi5 jau5 loeng5 go3 sai3 mui2.	She has two younger sisters.
我老婆上班。	ngo5 lou5 po4 soeng6 baan1.	My wife is at work.
呢個係佢老公。	nei1 go3 hai6 keoi5 lou5 gung1.	This is her husband.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 係, hai6 ("to be")

係咩?

hai6 mei?

"Really?"

係 is a verb with many different functions. Often, it translates to the English verb "to be." However, we primarily use 係 to express that one noun is equivalent to another, as in the sentence 我係你爸爸 (ngo5 hai6 nei5 baa4 baal.) - "I am your father." Adjectives do not link to nouns often using 係. So the English sentence "He is tall," would not use 係 in Cantonese.

In a simple sentence using 係, the noun after 係 is usually more general in meaning or reference than the noun before 係. Only when both nouns are equally specific can they be interchanged.

For Example:

1. 我係你大佬。

ngo5 hai6 nei5 daai6 lou2

- "I'm your brother."
2. 佢係劉德華。  
heoi5 hai6 lau4 dak1 waa4  
"He is Andy Lau."
  3. 呢個係我爸爸。  
ni1 go3 hai6 ngo5 baal baal  
"This is my father."
  4. 嗰個係佢家姐。  
go 2 go3 hai6 heoi5 gaal ze2  
"That is her older sister."
  5. 我哋係老公老婆。  
ngo5 dei2 hai6 lou5 gung1 lou5 po4  
"We are husband and wife."
  6. 邊個係你男朋友?  
bin1 go3 hai6 nei5 naam4 pang4 jau5  
"Who is your boyfriend?"

## Cultural Insight

### The Legend of Andy Lau

What's that? You haven't heard of Andy Lau? The incredible acting, singing, and dancing Andy Lau? The entertainment tycoon of the Orient and cover boy for Asian men's magazines?

The Hong Kong film industry is relatively small, which means that you'll see the same actors again and again in different films. Andy Lau is one of the most popular and bankable Hong Kong stars, and if you don't know him now, you'll recognize him on sight before spending too long in Hong Kong. Lau started his career on television in the early 1980s. His increasing popularity lead him into a singing career and then into film. To date, he has made over one hundred movies, including silly Hong Kong films like Future X-Cops and Cat and Mouse and more artistically ambitious films like Zhang Yimou's 2004 film House of Flying Daggers. As his wealth and fame has grown, Andy Lau has attempted to play a greater role in expanding the Hong Kong film industry. In 1991, he set up his own production company called Teamwork Motion Pictures. This led him to being recognized as the "Asian Filmmaker of the Year" in the Pusan International Film Festival in 2006. In addition to being an active singer and director, Andy is increasingly well-known for ongoing speculation about his love life, a perennial subject in the Hong Kong entertainment dailies.



Absolute Beginner S1  
Compliments to the Cantonese Chef

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## Traditional Chinese

我個餸點啊?  
 正!  
 我個人點啊?  
 仲正!

## Jyutping

ngo5 go3 sung3 dim2 aa3?  
 zeng3!  
 ngo5 go3 jan4 dim2 aa3?  
 zung6 zeng3!

## English

How is the food I made?  
 Awesome!  
 What about me?  
 Even better!

2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
粥	zuk1	porridge
餸	sung3	dish
湯	tong1	soup
甜品	tim4 ban2	dessert
糖水	tong4 seoi2	Cantonese dessert
人	jan4	person
正	zeng3	awesome
靚	leng3	beautiful/good
仲	zung6	even more

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

我鍾意食粥。	ngo5 zung1 ji3 sik6 zuk1.	I like eating porridge.
今晚有三個餸。	gam1 maan5 jau5 saam1 go3 sung3.	We have three dishes tonight.
廣東人鍾意飲湯。	gwong2 dung1 jan4 zung1 ji3 jam2 tong1.	Cantonese people like having soup.
有冇甜品？	jau5 mou5 tim4 ban2?	Is there dessert?
我想食糖水。	ngo5 soeng2 sik6 tong4 seoi2.	I want to have some Cantonese dessert.
佢個人好好。	keoi5 go3 jan4 hou2 hou2.	His personality is very nice.
正！	zeng3!	Awesome!
你好靚。	nei5 hou2 leng3.	You're beautiful.
佢跑得仲慢。	keoi5 paau2 dak1 zung6 maan6.	He runs even slower.

## Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson is 仲 ("even more")

仲正！

zung6 zeng3!

"Even better!"

We use 仲 (zung6) in Cantonese to form a comparison to mean "even more... (something adjective)." The example given in the dialogue was 仲正 (zung6 zeng3) - "even better." When using 仲, an adjective always follows.

For Example:

1. 我慢，佢仲慢。  
ngo5 maan6, keoi5 zung6 maan6  
"I'm slower, but he's even slower."
2. 佢地仲快。  
keoi5 dei6 zung6 faai3  
"They're even faster."
3. 嗰個湯仲靚。  
go2 go3 soeng1 zung6 leng3  
"That soup is even better."

Note that 仲 and 好 are interchangeable.



For Example:

1. 呢個餸好好。  
ni1 go3 sung3 hou2 hou2  
"This dish is even better."
2. 嗰個送仲好。  
go2 go3 sung3 zung6 hou2  
"This dish is even better."

## Cultural Insight

### In the Kitchen with Cantonese Cooking

Guangdong sits at the confluence of East and West and draws diverse ingredients from a variety of regions. This lends to the fact that Cantonese cuisine is varied, intricate, and subtle at the same time. Cantonese people are renowned throughout China for cooking almost anything and everything. There is a saying that goes "If it has four legs and is not a chair, two wings and flies and is not an airplane, and if it swims and is not a submarine, the Cantonese will eat it." Cantonese cuisine relies heavily on steaming and stir-frying as the two most common techniques for cooking due to their convenience and rapidity and their ability to bring out the flavor of the freshest ingredients. A number of ingredients are prominently used such as spring onion, sugar, salt, soy sauce, rice wine, cornstarch, vinegar, and sesame oil.

Due to Guangdong's location on the southern coast of China, fresh, live seafood is a specialty in Cantonese cuisine. Going to a restaurant in Guangdong, don't be surprised to find a long row of fish tanks lining the front of the restaurant filled with a wide variety of sea life.

After a meal, the traditional dessert consists of a "sweet soup." A red bean soup with taro is standard.



## Absolute Beginner S1

## Being Told You're Really Ugly in Cantonese

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## Traditional Chinese

---

廣東話點講 ugly 啊?  
 樣衰。  
 哦, “你好樣衰”!  
 ...  
 啱唔啱啊?  
 啱。

## Jyutping

---

gwong2 dung1 waa2 dim2 gong2 ugly a3?  
 joeng2 seoil .  
 o2, "nei5 hou2 joeng2 seoil " !  
 ...  
 ngaam1 m4 ngaam1 a3?  
 ngaam1.

## English

---

How do you say “ugly” in Cantonese?  
 Jeong2 seoil  
 Oh, “you’re very ugly”!  
 ....  
 Is it right?  
 Yes.

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
點講	dim2 gong2	how to say/speak
樣衰	joeng2 seoil	ugly
啱	ngaaml	correct
瘦	sau3	sau3
肥	fei4	fat
熱	jit6	hot
凍	dung3	cold
高	goul	tall
矮	ai2	short

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

呢個點講?	nil go3 dim2 gong2?	How do you say this?
佢唔樣衰。	keoi5 m4 joeng2 seoil.	He's not ugly.
你啱。	nei5 ngaaml.	You're right.
我瘦咗。	ngo5 sau3 zo2.	I lost weight.
你肥咗。	nei5 fei4 zo2.	You gained weight.
太陽晒著炎熱的沙漠。	taai3 joeng4 saai3 zoek6 jim4 jit6 dik1 saal mok6	The sun is heating the hot desert.
加拿大好凍。	gaal naa4 daai6 hou2 dung3.	Canada is cold.
佢又高又瘦。	keoi5 jau6 goul jau6 sau3.	She's tall and thin.
佢又肥又矮。	keoi5 jau6 fei4 jau6 ai2.	She's fat and short.

## Grammar Points

The focus of this lesson is a review of grammatical patterns

你好樣衰 nei5 hou2 joeng2 seoil

"You're very ugly"

好 hou2 is an adverb of degree meaning "very". In Cantonese it functions to connect the subject of the sentence with the object. For example 你好靚 - "you are very pretty". The subject 你 is connected to the object 靚 (leng3) by the adverb 好. Another example involving Jackie Chan is 成龍好靚仔 (sing4 lung4 hou2 leng3 zai) - "Jackie Chan is very handsome."

Two other adverbs of degree that have been covered in the Absolute Beginner series are 太 ("too") and 仲 ("even more"). These two words function in the same manner as 好, being placed in between the subject and object.

Examples:

1. 呢個太貴。  
nil go3 taai3 gwai3  
"That is too expensive."
2. 呢個太大。  
nil go3 taai3 daai6  
"That is too big."
3. 我唔可以食, 太熱啦。  
ngo5 m4 ho2 ji5 sik6 , taai3 jit6 laa6  
"It's too hot, I can't eat it."
4. 佢仲慢。  
keoi5 zung6 maan6  
"He's even slower."
5. 我仲矮。  
ngo5 zung6 aai2  
"I'm even shorter."
6. 嗰個仲凍。  
go2 go3 zung6 dung3  
"That one is even colder."

## Cultural Insight

### Honest and Direct

It is not uncommon to experience surprisingly blunt and pointed comments while in China. Observations about your body shape, weight, physical appearance, and decision-making skills will be brought to the table by strangers. "You have never met me before" might be the first thought that comes to your mind, but after some time, these seemingly rude inquiries will seem commonplace. After interacting with some locals, you will soon see this is how they treat each other, and not just the out of place "Westerner." Soon you may find yourself asking personal questions such as "are you married?" and "how much do you make?" of random strangers. While in Guangdong these questions may come in higher numbers, Hong Kong's exposure to Western practices has diminished this noisy practice.

In mainland China, the history of the communist party has created an environment where there are no secrets, and the sense of community means everyone is entitled

to their own opinion. Even in traditional Chinese culture there were no locked doors in the house. So fair warning: expect your privacy to be invaded.



## Absolute Beginner S1

## Drinks on Me in Cantonese

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## Traditional Chinese

---

今晚去酒吧飲酒？  
啊...  
我請。  
一定到。

## Jyutping

---

gam1 maan5 heoi3 zau2 baal jam2 zau2?  
aa4 ...  
ngo5 ceng2。  
jat1 ding6 dou3。

## English

---

How about we have a drink in the bar tonight?  
Uh...  
My treat.  
I'll definitely be there.



2

## Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
夜晚	je6 maan5	night
白日	baak6 jat6	day
今晚	gam1 maan5	tonight
聽晚	ting1 maan5	tomorrow night
尋晚	cam4 maan5	last night
今日	gam1 jat6	today
聽日	ting1 jat6	tomorrow
尋日	cam4 jat6	yesterday
酒吧	zau2 baa6	bar
我請	ngo5 cing2	my treat
一定	jat1 ding6	definitely
到	dou3	to arrive

## Vocabulary Sample Sentences

我夜晚去酒吧。	ngo5 je6 maan5 heoi3 zau2 baal.	I go to bars at night.
佢白日做野。	keoi5 baak6 jat6 zou6 je5.	he works in the day.
我哋今晚去玩。	ngo5 dei6 gam1 maan5 heoi3 waan2 。	We're going out tonight.
佢哋聽晚返。	keoi5 dei6 ting1 maan5 faan1.	They'll be back tomorrow night.
你尋晚去咗邊?	nei5 cam4 maan5 heoi3 zo2 bin1?	where were you last night?
我今日見到你。	ngo5 gam1 jat6 gin3 dou2 nei5.	I saw you today.
聽日返工。	ting1 jat6 faan2 gung1.	(I'll) go to work (in the office) tomorrow.
你尋日遲到。	nei5 cam4 jat6 ci4 dou3.	You were late yesterday.
前邊有間酒吧。	cin4 bin1 jau5 gaan1 zau2 baal.	There's a bar in front.
我請你飲嘢。	ngo5 ceing2 nei5 jam2 je5.	I'll buy you a drink.
我一定請你飲嘢。	ngo5 jat1 ding6 ceng2 nei5 jam2 je5.	I'll definitely buy you a drink.
我地一定到。	ngo5 dei6 jat1 ding6 dou3.	We'll be there.

## Grammar Points

The focus of this lesson is time words 今晚 gam1 maan5 ("Tonight")

今晚去酒吧飲酒? gam1 maan5 heoi3 zau2 baal jam2 zau2?

"How about we have a drink in the bar tonight?"

This grammar point focuses on where to place time words in a Cantonese sentence. In a Cantonese sentence, the time word is placed at the beginning of the sentence. If the sentence has a subject, you can place the time word either before or after the subject. If the subject is omitted then the time word simply goes at the beginning of the sentence.

For example, 我而家口渴 (ngo5 ji4 gaal hau2 hot3) - "I'm thirsty right now." The time word 而家 (ji4 gaal) - "right now" is placed in front of the verb. If taken word for word, the sentence looks like "I right now to be very thirsty."

Examples:

1. 你今日忙唔忙?  
nei5 gam1 jat6 mong4 m4 mong4  
"Are you busy today?"  
Time word: 今日
2. 我尋晚去左。  
ngo5 cam4 maan5 heoi3 zo2  
"I went there last."  
Time word: 尋晚
3. 今晚我們去酒吧飲酒?  
gam1 maan5 ngo5 mun4 heoi3 zau2 baal jam2 zau2  
"How about we go out for a drink tonight?"  
Time word: 今晚

## Cultural Insight

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### [A View from the Top](#)

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A view of Victoria Harbor goes well with an immaculately made drink at one of Hong Kong's many luxury bars.

Starting with the grandfather of the harbor view bars, Felix offers wide sweeping views of the neon lit harbor while lighting up the colonial-style Peninsula hotel. It's an old-school high roller place that bans kids and enforces a strict dress code, but get past the elitism and you'll find yourself in Hong Kong's most classic harbor view bar.

At Aqua Spirit, enjoy the floor-to-ceiling view of the harbor as you battle vertigo. Sip the Aquatini while observing every little detail of Northern Hong Kong island.

Perched on the top floor of the Excelsior, you will find the restaurant ToTT (Talk of the Town). Here you can enjoy champagne brunches and special occasion dinners. Enjoy a fruity cocktail on the roof terrace during one of those clear Hong Kong summer nights.

## Thank You!

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