

3.11 Courses and classes

3.11.1 Subjects of study

Subjects of study – courses – frequently end in xué ‘study; learning’ (cf. xuésheng); however, when a subject consists of two or more syllables, the xué is optional. Here are some examples:

shùxué	(numbers-study)	mathematics
lishǐ<xué>		history
wùlǐ<xué>	(things-principles)	physics
jīngjì<xué>		economics
wénxué	(language-study)	literature
gōngchéng<xué>		engineering
guǎnlǐxué		management

Tǐyù ‘physical education’, however, is more ‘sports’ than a subject of study, so it does not usually occur with xué.

3.11.2 Talking about classes

a) *Classes, courses, sessions:*

Many words function as both nouns and measure words. Kè, for example, as a noun means ‘subject; course’, but as an M, it means ‘lesson’. M’s only appear after numbers (or demonstratives), and are optionally followed by nouns: yí ge <xuésheng>; zhèi ge rén, yí kuài <qián>. But where there is no number (or demonstrative), there will be no measure words:

Jīntiān méiyǒu kè.	[I] don’t have class today.
Kè hěn nán.	The course/class is tough.
Méiyǒu pǐjiǔ le.	[We]’re out of beer!

Nouns may be counted with different measures, each conveying slightly different nuances. Kè, as a noun meaning ‘subject’ or ‘class’, for example, can be counted with the M mén (whose root-meaning is ‘door’) when the sense is ‘a course’; with jié (root-meaning ‘segment’) or táng (root-meaning ‘hall’), when the meaning is ‘a class session’.

word	kè	táng	jié	mén	bān
as NOUN	subject	hall	segment	door	session; class
as M.	lesson	class	class	course/subj	[flight etc.]

Examples

M: mén	Zhèi ge xuéqī, nǐ yǒu jǐ mén kè?	How many courses do you have
N: kè	Wǒ yǒu sì mén kè.	this term? / I have four.

N: kè	Jīntiān hái yǒu biéde kè ma?	Do [you] have other classes today?
M: táng	Hái yǒu liǎng táng.	I still have two more.
M: jié	Jīntiān yǒu jǐ jié?	How many [classes] today?
N: kè	Jīntiān méiyǒu kè.	I don't have any classes today.
M: jié	Nà, míngtiān ne, míngtiān yǒu jǐ jié?	Well, what about tomorrow, how many [classes] tomorrow?
	Míngtiān zhǐ yǒu yì jié: shùxué.	Tomorrow, I just have one – mathematics.
N: kè	Jīntiān yǒu kè, kěshi míngtiān méiyǒu!	There's class today, but not tomorrow.
M: kè	Zhè shì dì-yī kè	This is the first lesson.
M: kè	Yígòng yǒu sānshí kè.	There are 30 lessons altogether.

Besides the noun kè 'class', the noun bān, whose root meaning is 'shift' or 'session' (cf. shàngbān 'go to work'), is also relevant to the subject of taking classes. Large sessions (or 'lectures') are dàbān; small sessions (or 'sections') are xiǎobān. These are counted with the general-M, gè:

Yígòng yǒu wǔ ge bān, liǎng ge dàbān, sān ge xiǎobān.	[There are] five sessions altogether, 2 lectures and 3 sections.
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Like kè, bān can also be a M, but not for classes or the like. Bān is common as a M for trips of regularly scheduled transport, such as busses and airplanes: Xīngqīyī-sān-wǔ yǒu yì bān. 'There's a flight/bus/train on MWF.'

b) 'Taking' classes

In the examples under a), 'taking a class' was construed as 'having a class': yǒu wǔ mén kè. However, you should be aware that just as English allows the option of saying 'how many courses do you have' and 'how many are you taking', so Chinese offers options with shàng '(attend) take'; and [particularly in Taiwan] xiū '(cultivate) take', along with yǒu 'have':

Nǐ zhèi ge xuéqī shàng / yǒu / xiū jǐ mén kè?	How many courses are you taking this semester?
Wǒ shàng / yǒu / xiū wǔ mén.	I'm taking 5.

3.11.3 Moveable adverbs (dāngrán; yídìng)

a) Dāngrán 'of course'

Dāngrán, like yígòng, is classed as a moveable adverb, because some of the positional requirements of typical adverbs (such as the requirement of a following verb) are relaxed:

Lǐbàiwǔ yǒu kè ma?
Dāngrán, měitiān dōu yǒu kè.
 Yǒu zuòyè ma?
Dāngrán yǒu zuòyè, měitiān
dōu yǒu zuòyè.

Are there classes on Friday?
Of course, there are classes everyday.
 Any homework?
Of course there's homework,
there's homework everyday!

b) Yídìng 'for certain; for sure'

Xīngqīliù yídìng méi kè ma?
Xīngqīliù, xīngqītiān yídìng
méiyǒu kè.

Is [it] certain that there's no class on Sat.?
For certain there are no classes on Saturday
and Sunday.

Yídìng is especially common in the negative, bù yídìng 'not necessarily', when it often stands alone. Frequently, bù yídìng can be followed by a comment beginning with yǒude 'some', literally 'there are some of them [which]':

Kǎoshì dōu hěn nán ma?
Bù yídìng. Yǒude hěn nán,
yǒude bù nán!

Are the tests all difficult?
Not necessarily. Some are difficult,
some aren't.

Xuéshēng yídìng hěn lèi ma?
Bù, lǎoshī hěn lèi, xuéshēng
bù yídìng.

Are students necessarily always tired?
No, teachers are tired, students aren't
necessarily.

Exercise 9.

Express the following:

1. In all, you're taking 5 courses this semester, and they're all hard.
2. In Beijing, November isn't necessarily cold but July is certainly hot.
3. You have lots of classes on Tuesday and Thursday, but only one on Wednesday.
4. The lecture has 120 students, but the sections only have 12.
5. The mathematics teacher isn't too strict, but the tests are hard.
6. You don't have any more classes today.
7. You were nervous yesterday, but you're okay today.
8. The physics teacher's very strict, so I'm nervous in class.

3.11.4 Question words as indefinites

Question words in Chinese have two faces: they can function in questions (corresponding to the *wh-words* of English – 'who', 'what', 'where', etc.), and they can function as indefinites (corresponding to 'anyone', 'anything', 'anywhere', etc.) So shénme, in addition to its interrogative use, can also mean 'anything' in a non-interrogative context. The sense is often 'anything in particular':

Méi shénme wèntí.	[I] don't have any questions [in particular].
Méi shénme gōngkè.	[We] don't have any homework [in particular].
Xièxie nǐ lái jiē wǒ. <i>Méi shénme. Hěn jìn!</i>	Thanks for coming to pick me up. <i>[It] 's nothing – it's close by.</i>
Duìbuqǐ, nǐ xìng shénme, wǒ wàng le. <i>Méi shénme. Wǒ xìng Zōu.</i>	Sorry, what was your name – I've forgotten. <i>That's all right. My surname's Zou (sic!)</i>

Many more examples of question-words used as indefinites will be encountered in later units.

3.12 Dialogue: courses and classes

Jiǎ and Yǐ are classmates at school, chatting over breakfast before going to class.

Jiǎ	Èi, nǐ hǎo, jīntiān zěnmeyàng?	Hi, how are you? How's it going today?
Yǐ	<i>Hái hǎo, hái hǎo.</i>	<i>Fine, fine.</i>
Jiǎ	Nǐ jīntiān máng bu máng?	You busy today?
Yǐ.	<i>Hěn máng.</i>	<i>I am!</i>
Jiǎ.	Wèishénme?	How come?
Yǐ.	<i>Yīnwèi yǒu kǎoshì.</i>	<i>Because I have a test.</i>
Jiǎ.	Yǒu shénme kǎoshì?	What test?
Yǐ.	<i>Zhōngwén kǎoshì.</i>	<i>A Chinese [language] test.</i>

Jiǎ	Nà míngtiān ne?	Well how about tomorrow?
Yǐ	<i>Míngtiān méiyǒu. Míngtiān hái hǎo.</i>	<i>None tomorrow, tomorrow's fine.</i>
Jiǎ	Yǒu gōngkè ma?	Do [you] have any homework?
Yǐ	<i>Yǒu, dāngrán yǒu.</i>	<i>Sure, of course [we] do.</i>
Jiǎ	Zhōngwén, gōngkè duō bu duō?	Is there a lot of homework in Chinese?
Yǐ	<i>Hěn duō, kěshi hěn yǒuyìsi!</i>	<i>There's a lot, but it's interesting.</i>

Jiǎ	Hěn nán ba!	It must be difficult.
Yǐ	Bù tài nán, hái hǎo.	It's not so bad, it's fine.
Jiǎ	Nǐ hái yǒu shénme biéde kè?	What other classes do you have? (you still have what other classes)
Yǐ	Jīntiān, hái yǒu wùlǐ, shùxué, míngtiān yǒu lìshǐ.	I still have physics and maths today, tomorrow I have history.
Jiǎ	Zhōngwén měitiān dōu yǒu ma?	Do you have Chinese everyday? (Chinese daily all have Q)
Yǐ	Xīngqīyī dào sì dōu yǒu, xīngqīwǔ méiyǒu.	Everyday [from] Monday to Thursday, not on Friday. (Monday to Thurs all have, Friday not-have)
Jiǎ	Zhèi ge xuéqī yígòng shàng sì mén kè ma?	You're taking 4 courses altogether this semester? ('this M term altogether take...')
Yǐ	Yígòng shàng wǔ mén, hái yǒu tǐyù. Kěshì tǐyù méi shénme gōngkè.	Five altogether; there's PE as well. But PE doesn't have any homework.
Jiǎ	Wǔ mén kè, yídìng hěn lèi.	Five courses, [you] must be tired!
Yǐ	Hái kěyǐ.	[I] manage.

Variations:

Instead of: Nǐ jīntiān máng bu máng?

Jīntiān nǐ jǐn<zhāng> bù jǐnzhāng?	Are you nervous today?
Jīntiān nǐ lèi bu lèi?	Are you tired today?
Jīntiān hǎo ma?	Are things okay today?
Nǐ shū<fu> bù shūfu?	Are you comfortable?

Instead of: Yǒu kǎoshì.

Yǒu gōngkè.	There's/[we] have homework
Yǒu zuòyè.	There's/[we] have an assignment.
Yǒu bàogào.	There's/[we] have a report.
Yǒu shíyàn.	There's/[we] have a lab.

Exercise 10.

Here are some sentences written by students learning Chinese; identify the likely mistakes and explain (if you can); then correct them.

1. *Wǒmen hái méi chī le.
 2. *Méiyǒu kǎoshì míngtiān.
 3. *Zhōu, nǐ è bu è?
 4. *Míngtiān yǒu shénme kǎoshì? / Míngtiān méiyǒu.
 5. *Chī fàn le ma? / Hái méi ne? / Wǒ yě. ('Me neither!')
 6. *Tā hěn hǎochī.
 7. *Míngtiān shénme kǎoshì nǐ yǒu?
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