

this, that, these, those

English A1

What this topic teaches

Chinese has 这 and 那, and English has the same pair: **this** and **that**. You are halfway done before you begin. The new part: English adds a plural pair, **these** and **those**, and the vowel changes with it.

- **this** / **these** point at things near you. **that** / **those** point at things far from you.
- *this, that* go with one thing; *these, those* go with many.
- Memory hook: *this* and *these* are short words for things you can almost touch. *That* and *those* have an o – a long, far-away sound for far-away things.
- is *What is this?* You already speak this grammar; today we just add the plural.

Near and far: this and that

With one thing, the choice is only about distance .

Distance	Word	Example
near (in your hand, beside you)	this	This is my pen.
far (across the room, over there)	that	That is our school.

- Use them before a noun – *this book, that boy* – or alone as the subject: *This is heavy. That smells good.*
- Pointing at your own lunch and saying *that* is a small tragedy for the lunch. If you can touch it, it is *this*.
- On the phone, English flips the pointing at the speaker: “*Hi, **this is** Lin*” means “I am Lin”. And to ask who is calling: “*Who is **that?***” The person far from you is *that*, even inside your phone.

Plurals: these and those

More than one thing, and the vowel stretches.

Distance	Singular	Plural
near	this	these
far	that	those

- *These books are mine. Those birds are loud.*
- △ The pair must match the noun: *these book* ×, *those students* ✓. The pointing word and the noun are plural together or not at all.

- Pronunciation trap for the ear: *this* has a short i, *these* has a long ee. Say *this ship* and *these sheep* aloud. If your sheep sound like a ship, your listener will be briefly confused but politely silent.
- *is these books*; *is those*. Chinese keeps the same pair and marks the plural only on the measure word; English changes the pointing word itself.

This, that and time

The same near/far idea works for time.

- **this** pulls time close: *this week, this morning, this year* – the period you are inside now.
- **that** pushes time away: *that day, that summer, that night* – a moment you are looking back at.
- *That was a great party* – the party is over, so it is already “far”. *This is a great party* – said inside the party, ideally not while leaving.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Do not say “*this is meaning...*” to ask about a word.** Ask *What does this word mean?* The pointing word is not a verb.
- △ **Answer with *it*, not with *this*.** *What is this?* – *It is a stapler*. English points once with *this*, then switches to *it*. Answering “*This is a stapler*” is understandable but sounds like a game show.
- △ ***these are* and *those are* need the plural be.** *These is* belongs to the same bin as *they is*.
- △ On the phone, do not say “*I am Lin.*” The call begins “*This is Lin.*” Small phrase, huge first impression.

Say it aloud

Walk around the room. Touch things, point at things, and narrate your life like a nature documentary.

- This is my desk. These are my books.
- That is the door. Those are the windows.
- This is my phone, and these are my excuses for looking at it.

Then call a classmate and open with: “*Hi, this is ____.*”

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. ____ *is my ruler* (it is in your hand). – **This**. Touching distance means *this*.
2. ____ *are mountains* (far away, many). – **Those**. Far and plural: the long far-away word.
3. *What is this?* – **It is a stapler**. Point once with *this*, then switch to *it*.
4. On the phone: “*Hi, ____ is Lin.*” – **this**. On the phone you are *this*; the other person is *that*.
5. *Zhèxiē shū* – **these books**. Near, plural, and the pointing word changes to match.