

English A1 · The verb to be

Beginner English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

The shape-shifter verb

You already know this idea. English just dresses it in three costumes: am, is, are.

Same idea, new costume

One idea, two languages

— I am a student.

The Chinese word never changes. English be becomes am, is or are.

The three shapes: am, is, are

Person	Form	Example
I	am	I am happy.
he / she / it	is	She is a doctor.
you / we / they	are	They are classmates.

Use the evidence

Chant it: I am, he is, the rest are.

Build a sentence: she

- 1 **Pick the person** she — one person.
- 2 **Pick the costume** One person takes is.
- 3 **Add the rest** a doctor.
- 4 **The sentence** She is a doctor.

Decision

Person first, then the shape, then the rest.

Your turn: pick the shape

Your turn

They ____ my classmates.

- ☐ A. am
- ☐ B. is
- ☐ C. are
- ☐ D. be

Short forms for real life

Full form	Short form	Example
I am	I'm	I'm tired.
she is / it is	she's / it's	It's Friday.
we are / they are	we're / they're	We're ready.

Use the evidence

English speakers are lazy in a hurry; short forms are everywhere.

When to dress formally

Speaking and friendly email

I'm tired. She's from Beijing. We're ready.

Neutral to informal: the everyday default.

Exam essay, formal letter

I am writing to apply. It is clear that...

Formal: use the full forms.

Your turn: the apostrophe trap

Your turn

Which sentence is correct?

- A. Its Friday, so I'm happy.
- B. It's Friday, so I'm happy.
- C. Its' Friday, so Im happy.
- D. It Friday, so I am happy.

Saying no: the not wall

- 1 **Start with a statement** She is busy.
- 2 **Build the wall** Put not right after the verb: She is not busy.
- 3 **Shorten if you like** She isn't busy.

Decision

not stands right after be. Nothing jumps over the wall.

Your turn: build the negative

Your turn

They are at home. Make it negative.

- A. They not are at home.
- B. They don't are at home.
- C. They aren't at home.
- D. They arent' at home.

Two languages, two question machines

Chinese

— Are you a student?

Add a small word at the end. Nothing moves.

English

You are a student. → Are you a student?

Flip the verb to the front. Nothing is added.

The flip, step by step

- 1 **Start with a statement** You are ready.
- 2 **Find the verb** are.
- 3 **Move it to the front** Are you ready?
- 4 **Check** Nothing else moved; no word was added.

Decision

Statement order: you are. Question order: are you.

Short answers, full verbs

Question	Yes	No
Are you a student?	Yes, I am.	No, I'm not.
Is she Chinese?	Yes, she is.	No, she isn't.
Are they ready?	Yes, they are.	No, they aren't.

Use the evidence

Never Yes, I'm — a short form refuses to stand at the end.

Your turn: make the question

Your turn

He is ready. Make it a question.

- A. He is ready?
- B. Is he ready?
- C. Does he is ready?
- D. Are he ready?

The adjective needs its verb

— so close, and yet

— He is very tall.

— He is very happy.

The three classic traps

The trap	Why it tempts you	The fix
He very tall.	needs no verb	He is very tall.
He a teacher.	feels complete	He is a teacher. /
They is here.	One word in Chinese, three in English	They are here.

Use the evidence

Catch each trap once, laugh at it, and move on.

Your turn: repair the sentence

Your turn

— which English is correct?

- A. He very happy.
- B. He is very happy.
- C. He has very happy.
- D. He are very happy.

Say it aloud

I am + your name. Say it aloud.



I am from + your city. My best friend is + a name.



One true negative: I am not a morning person.



Record yourself once; listen for am, is, are.

Check yourself

- She ____ a doctor. — is: one person takes is.
- They are late, negative? — They aren't late: not stands right after are.
- You are free tonight, question? — Are you free tonight: the verb flips to the front.
- — He is very happy: the adjective needs is.