

Expressing Approximate Numbers in Mandarin Chinese

<https://youtu.be/uNUjcbfTHEM>

Grammar point 1

几, 十几, 几十

Jǐ

1. 几: 2 to 9

"Jǐ" can indicate a vague number within 10, and there must be a measure word after.

Chē shàng yǒu jǐ ge rén.

Eg: 车 上 有 几 个 人。

There are several people in the car.

Wǒ xiǎng mǎi jǐ běn shū.

我 想 买 几 本 书。

I want to buy some books.

Wǒ děng le tā jǐ fēn zhōng.

我 等 了 她 几 分 钟。

I waited for her for a few minutes.

shí jǐ

2. 十几: more than 10

"Jǐ" can be used after the "ten" to indicate a number greater than 10 and less than 20.

Zhè ge gōng sī yǒu shí jǐ ge rén.

Eg: 这 个 公 司 有 十 几 个 人。

There are more than ten people in this company.

Wǒ qù chāo shì mǎi le shí jǐ ge jī dàn.

我 去 超 市 买 了 十 几 个 鸡 蛋。

I went to the supermarket and bought more than 10 eggs.

Zhè ge yuè, tā xué le shí jǐ ge Hànzì.

这个月，她学了十几个汉字。

This month, she has learned more than 10 Chinese characters.

Jǐ shí

3. 几十: tens of

"Jǐ" can be also used before the "ten", indicating a number greater than 20 and less than 100.

Měi ge bān lǐ dōu yǒu jǐ shí ge rén.

Eg: 每个班里都有几十个人。

There are dozens of people in each class.

Zhè ge dōng xī jiù jǐ shí kuài qián, bú guì.

这个东西就几十块钱，不贵。

This is not expensive, only less than ¥100.

Tā yǐ jīng zhù zài Shàng hǎi jǐ shí nián le.

他已经住在上海几十年了。

He has lived in Shanghai for decades.

Grammar point 2

多

duō

1. numeral + 多 + measure word

When a number is greater than 10, you should place the "duō" (more) before the measure word.

Tā mǎi le shí duō běn shū. = Tā mǎi le shí jǐ běn shū.

Eg: 他买了十多本书。= 他买了十几本书。

He bought more than 10 books.

Bà ba wǔ shí duō suì le. = Bà ba wǔ shí jǐ suì le.

爸爸五十多岁了。= 爸爸五十几岁了。

Dad is in his fifties.

Bān lǐ yǒu èr shí duō ge rén. = Bān lǐ yǒu èr shí jǐ ge rén.

班里有二十多个人。= 班里有二十几个人。

There are more than 20 people in the class.

duō

2. numeral + measure word + 多

When a number is less than 10, the "duō" is placed after the measure word.

Zhè ge fáng zi yǒu sān mǐ duō gāo.

Eg: 这个房子有三米多高。

This house is over three meters high.

Liǎng nián duō yǐ qián, wǒ zài zhè lǐ jiàn guo tā.

两年多以前，我在这里见过他。

I met him here more than two years ago.

Wǒ mǎi le yì jīn duō píng guǒ.

我买了一斤多苹果。

I bought more than half a kilo of apples.

Grammar point 3

一点儿，一些

Yì diǎnr

一点儿: a very small number

Yì xiē

yì diǎnr

一些: some, more than “一点儿”

You can add a noun after either of them.

Tā chī le yì diǎnr fàn, xiànzài hǎo duō le.

Eg: 他吃了一点儿饭，现在好多了。

He ate a little, and is much better now.

Jiā lǐ méi táng le, nǐ bāng wǒ qù lín jū jiā jiè yì diǎnr táng ba.

家里没糖了，你帮我去邻居家借一点儿糖吧。

We ran out of sugar. Can you go borrow some from our neighbor?

Yǐ qián, tā gěi guo wǒ yì xiē bāng zhù.

以前，她给过我一些帮助。

She gave me some help before.

Wǒ cóng shū diàn mǎi le yì xiē xīn shū.

我从书店买了一些新书。

I bought some new books from the bookstore.

Grammar point 4

左右

zuǒ yòu

quantitative phrase + 左右

zuǒ yòu

“左右” means or so, it can be used after a quantitative phrase to indicate an approximate number.

Zhōu mò, wǒ yì bān shí diǎn zuǒ yòu qǐ chuáng.

Eg: 周末，我一般十点左右起床。

On weekends, I usually get up at 10 or so.

Wǒ men gōng sī yǒu wǔ bǎi rén zuǒ yòu.

我们公司五百人左右。

There are about 500 people in our company.

Zhāng jīng lǐ liǎng diǎn zuǒ yòu dǎ le ge diàn huà.

张 经 理 两 点 左 右 打 了 个 电 话。

Manager Zhang made a call at 2 or so.

Zhè ge bǐ jì běn diàn nǎo yào bā qiān kuài zuǒ yòu.

这 个 笔 记 本 电 脑 要 八 千 块 左 右。

This laptop costs about 8,000 yuan.

Grammar point 5

Two continuous numbers

We can also use two continuous numbers to say an approximate number.

1. Two continuous numbers (1-9) + measure word

Wǒ měi tiān xué xí yì liǎng ge xiǎo shí Hànyǔ.

Eg: 我 每 天 学 习 一 两 个 小 时 汉 语。

I study Chinese for an hour or two every day.

Nǐ dōu hē le sān sì bēi jiǔ le, bié hē le.

你 都 喝 了 三 四 杯 酒 了, 别 喝 了。

You've had three or four glasses of wine. You should stop now.

Cóng jiā dào gōng sī qí chē qī bā fēn zhōng jiù dào le.

从 家 到 公 司 骑 车 七 八 分 钟 就 到 了。

It only takes seven or eight minutes by bike from home to work.

Zhù xué xiào zhè biān hěn fāng biàn, fù jìn yǒu sì wǔ ge chē zhàn.

住 学 校 这 边 很 方 便, 附 近 有 四 五 个 车 站。

It's very convenient to live here. There are like four or five bus stops nearby.

shí

2. 十 + two continuous numbers (1-9) + measure word

Jiā lǐ hái yǒu shí yī èr ge jī dàn ne.

Eg: 家里还有 **十一二** 个鸡蛋呢。

There are eleven or twelve eggs in the house.

Tā de ér zǐ jīn nián shí wǔ liù suì le ba?

他的儿子今年 **十五六** 岁了吧?

Is his son like fifteen or sixteen?

Zhè liàng chē zhǐ néng zuò shí sān sì ge rén.

这辆车只能坐 **十三四** 个人。

This car can only seat thirteen or fourteen people.

shí

3. two continuous numbers (1-9) + **十** + measure word

Nà dòng lóu yǒu qī bā shí mǐ gāo.

Eg: 那栋楼有 **七八十** 米高。

That building is 70-80 meters high.

Tā zhǐ yǒu bā jiǔ shí jīn, dàn shì tā hái jué de zì jǐ hěn pàng.

她只有 **八九十** 斤,但是她还觉得自己很胖。

She weighs only eighty to ninety pounds, but she still feels fat.

Nà ge rén kàn qǐ lái sān sì shí suì.

那个人看起来 **三四十** 岁。

The man looks thirty to forty years old.

Grammar point 6

大约, 大概, 差不多

The three words are all used to make a guess or an estimation (about, around, or so).

They can be used before a quantitative phrase to say an approximate number.

Wǒ zuó wǎn zhǐ shuì le dà yuē wǔ ge xiǎo shí.

Eg: 我 昨 晚 只 睡 了 大 约 五 个 小 时。

I only slept about five hours last night.

Wǒ cāi tā dà gài liù shí suì.

我 猜 他 大 概 六 十 岁。

I guess that he is around 60 years old.

Xiàn zài yǐ jīng chà bù duō liù diǎn le.

现 在 已 经 差 不 多 六 点 了。

It's almost six o'clock.

Grammar point 7

将近, 近

jiāng jìn jìn

将 近 / 近 + integer + measure word.

close to

It's usually used before a number that's deemed to be a large number, to say it is close to that number.

Wǒ tài tai yǒu jìn bǎi shuāng xié.

Eg: 我 太 太 有 近 百 双 鞋。

My wife has nearly a hundred pairs of shoes.

Zuó tiān yǒu jìn qiān rén cān jiā le mǎ lā sōng bǐ sài.

昨 天 有 近 千 人 参 加 了 马 拉 松 比 赛。

Nearly a thousand people took part in the marathon yesterday.

Wǒ gěi tā dǎ le jiāng jìn èr shí ge diàn huà, tā dōu méi jiē.

我 给 她 打 了 将 近 二 十 个 电 话, 她 都 没 接。

I called her almost 20 times, but she didn't answer.