

Chinese Language Learning Guide

Introduction

Congratulations on your interest in a federal career that uses your Chinese skills! Chinese is a critically important language that holds strategic political and economic value for the United States. Chinese is the native language of over 1.3 billion people, and it is one of the official languages of the United Nations and the World Bank. China's economy is the second largest in the world, and China's global influence has increased in the 21st century through its economic growth and the spread of Chinese popular culture. Other Chinese-speaking countries and areas are also major centers of culture, trade, and diplomacy.

As you prepare for the workforce, you may have language-specific questions about the opportunities available to you. This guide will present an overview of language learning opportunities, including scholarships, summer learning programs, and university classes, and guidance for further developing your Chinese language skills through independent study to help you prepare to use these skills in a federal job. The links here reflect high-quality government and university resources, which you may use as a starting point for doing your own research to find the resources that work best for you.

As you continue to learn the language, you may find it helpful to consult the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (in [English](#) or [Chinese](#)) to track your progress. You may also want to refer to the government's [Chinese Roadmap](#) to find a list of resources grouped by level.

Language Learning Opportunities

Scholarships

There are many scholarships available for Chinese study, including scholarships for study abroad. You can even begin in high school with the [National Security Language Initiative for Youth](#) program, which awards scholarships to high school students to participate in summer and academic year immersion programs. Undergraduate and graduate students can apply for the [Boren Awards](#) to help fund study abroad with an intensive language study component. If you are specifically interested in summer language study abroad, consider the [Critical Language Scholarship Program](#). College seniors, graduate students, and young professionals can apply for [Fulbright U.S. Student Program](#) grants to pursue graduate study, conduct research, or teach English abroad in countries where Chinese is spoken. In addition to these government-sponsored scholarships, there are many private and school-specific scholarships, so be sure to search for other funding opportunities.

Pell Grant recipients can apply for the [Gilman Scholarship](#) to fund study or internships abroad, and you can enhance this scholarship with a [Critical Need Language Award](#) for Chinese. ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) students can apply to [Project GO](#) to enhance your language and intercultural communications skills. Your school may also have specific scholarships for language or area studies, so it may be helpful to talk to professors or financial aid officers to see what opportunities are available.

Additional Opportunities

Approximately 800 colleges and universities in the United States offered Chinese classes as of [2016](#). Even if your school doesn't offer classes, you can explore [summer learning opportunities](#) and the individual learning resources listed in this guide. If you are in high school through sophomore year of college, you may want to participate in a [STARTALK](#) program.

If you are still thinking about where to apply to college, you may want to consider a school with a [Chinese Flagship program](#). The Flagship programs offer students from various majors the opportunity to pursue advanced level language study, including an overseas study and internship experience, culminating in certification as a Flagship Certified Professional. Other colleges offer specific tracks for heritage learners, so be sure to look for these programs, too.

Guidance for Developing Your Skills

As a heritage speaker, you may want to focus on practicing your reading and writing skills to help your literacy skills match your speaking and listening skills. You may also want to study Chinese vocabulary for a specialized field, such as your major, to help you apply your language skills more broadly.

When choosing whether to study traditional or simplified Chinese characters, consider where you wish to work. Traditional characters are used in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, while simplified characters are used in mainland China and Singapore. You can also consider the overlap between the character sets. Since some [estimates](#) indicate that about 65% of common characters used in China are simplified, you may be able leverage your prior knowledge of either character set when learning the other. There are many [varieties](#) of Chinese, and while most of them cannot be understood by speakers of a different variety, they share a common writing system (traditional or simplified, depending on the country). The most common dialects requested for federal government jobs are Mandarin and, to a lesser extent, Cantonese. Domestically, different dialects are more common in different regions of the U.S., so if you prefer to work with U.S.-based communities, you should research which dialects and character types are most common in the region where you want to work.

The internet is full of resources that can help you practice Chinese. The University of Hawaii at Manoa's [Chinese Language Flagship Program](#) has a general [list of resources](#), or you can explore [flashcards](#) created by Flagship students from the University of Mississippi's [Chinese Language Flagship Program](#). The [National Foreign Language Center](#) at the University of Maryland offers a [portal](#) with higher level reading and listening materials, which you can select based on their level on the ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) scale, the language proficiency scale used by the U.S. government, as well as [Lectia](#), a free language learning app.

Several Language Resource Centers (federally funded programs at universities that provide language-learning research and resources) also offer materials for practicing Chinese. The [Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning](#) at the University of Texas at Austin has [links](#) to a variety of lessons, and the [National Resource Center for Asian Languages](#) at California State University, Fullerton provides [downloadable resources](#). If you would rather watch videos to practice, the [Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy](#) at the University of Arizona has a [playlist](#) with videos of a native Mandarin speaker giving short talks on simple topics.

Many other universities provide lists of resources for practicing your Chinese skills. A small sample includes resources from [St. Lawrence University](#), [University of California, Davis](#), and [Duke University](#). Some of these websites include links for Chinese media, such as newspapers and television channels. You may also enjoy consuming Chinese-language entertainment, such as music, movies, or C-dramas.