

## Mistake #1 Assuming “to be” = “是 (shì)”

When people ask you “how are you”, how would you answer “I am good” in Chinese? “我是好 (wǒ shì hǎo) – I AM GOOD” ? Wrong.

Probably the very first thing you learned in Chinese is that the verb “to be” in Chinese is “是 (shì)” . So you automatically assume that whenever you need to say “is, am, are, were, was” , you should use “是 (shì)” . This assumption is wrong.

In Chinese, adjectives such as “beautiful” , “smart” and “funny” function as verbs, so “beautiful” is already “to be beautiful” , “smart” is already “to be smart” and “funny” is already “to be funny” . Therefore, you don’ t need to say “She IS beautiful” ,you only need to say “She, beautiful” . “Is” assumed and should be dropped.

Also, you need to add the word “很 (hěn)” before the adjectives to provide a rhythmic balance. “很 (hěn)” means “very” , but its meaning is weak here. So from now on, do take the trouble to add “很 (hěn)” each time you say “She’ s pretty. I am happy. He’ s smart.”

So “I am good” in Chinese should be “我很好 (wǒ hěn hǎo)” . Here are a few more examples.

English	Pinyin	Chinese
I am good. (lit. I very good.)	wǒ hěn hǎo	我很好
She is pretty. (lit. She very pretty.)	tā hěn piào liang.	她很漂亮。
I am tired. (lit. I very tired.)	wǒ hěn lèi 。	我很累。
I am busy. (lit. I very busy.)	wǒ hěn máng 。	我很忙。

However, if you have a negation word, you don’ t need to add “很 (hěn)” anymore. I think the reason is that “不 (bù)” already provides that needed rhythmic balance.

English	Pinyin	Chinese
I am not good. (lit. I not good.)	wǒ bù hǎo 。	我不好。

## Common Chinese Mistakes Made by English Speakers

She is not pretty. (lit. She not pretty.)	tā bú piào liang 。	她不漂亮。
I am not tired. (lit. I not tired.)	wǒ bú lèi 。	我不累。
I am not busy. (lit. I not busy.)	wǒ bù máng 。	我不忙。

I just mentioned although “很 (hěn)” means very, its meaning is very weak. “If you want to express the meaning that “I am VERY tired” , use the word “非常 (fēi cháng)” instead of “很 (hěn)” .

English	Pinyin	Chinese
I am very good. (lit. I very good.)	wǒ fēi cháng hǎo 。	我非常好。
She is very pretty. (lit. She very pretty.)	tā fēi cháng piào liang 。	她非常漂亮。
I am very tired. (lit. I very tired.)	wǒ fēi cháng lèi 。	我非常累。
I am very very busy. (lit. I very very busy.)	wǒ fēi cháng fēi cháng máng 。	我非常非常忙。

### The usage of “是 (shì)”

Remember, in Chinese, we use “是 (shì)” a lot less often than we use the verb “to be” in English. In Chinese, “是 (shì)” is used when talking about someone’ s profession, identity or nationality. To simply put, you can think of “是 (shì)” as the equal sign “=” .

English	Pinyin	Chinese
I am Mary.	wǒ shì Mary.	我是Mary.
She is a student.	tā shì xué shēng 。	她是学生。 她是學生。
We are American.	wǒ men shì měi guó rén 。	我们是美国人。 我們是美國人。

I hope that helps! Thank you. Please feel free to let me know if you have any questions.