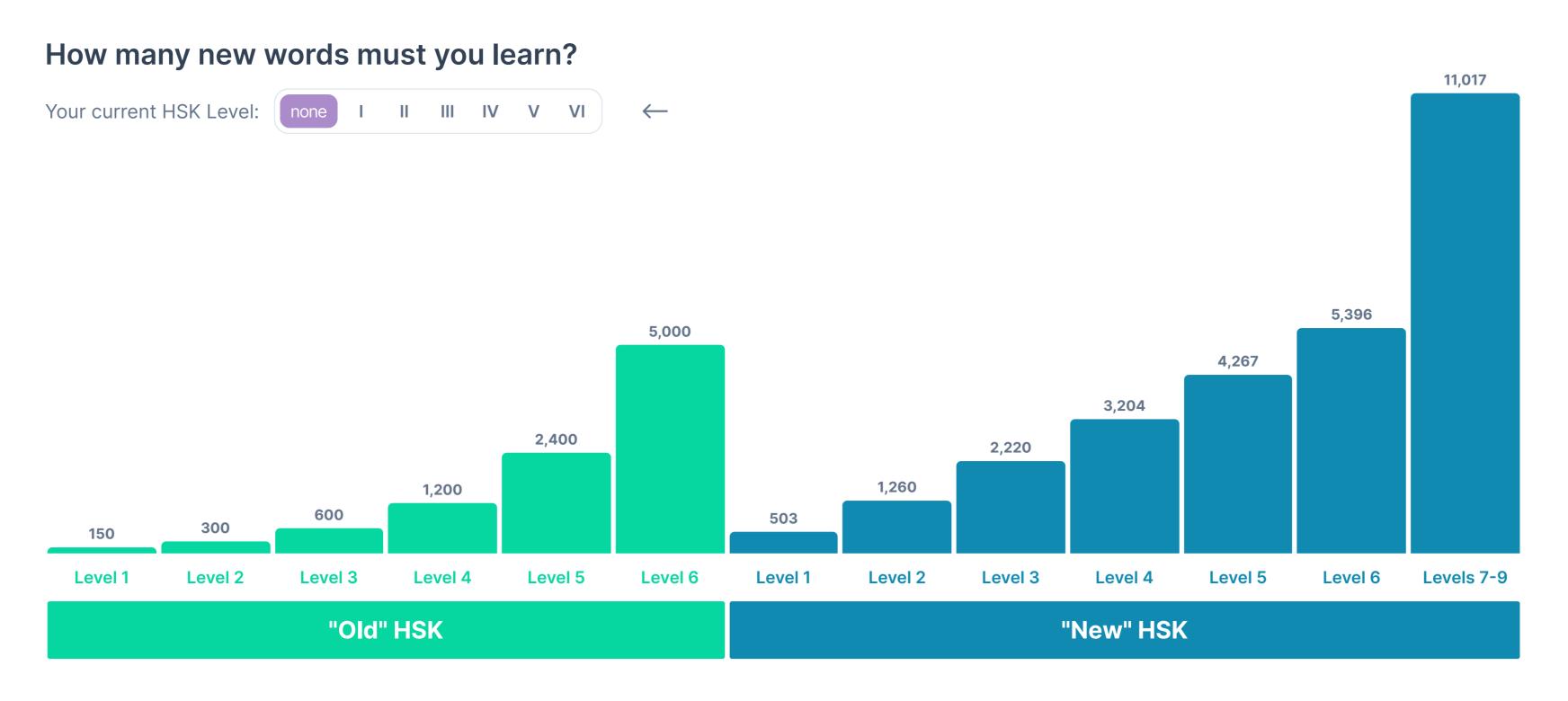
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Old vs. New HSK Comparison

The world's most recognized Chinese language proficiency exam is changing. We dove deep into the data so you know what to expect.



TLDR;

- China's official Chinese proficiency exam, the HSK, is changing to more accurately measure ability and to better align with international standards like the CEFR (Common European Framework).
- The updated exams are likely to cover more vocabulary, more grammar, and possibly more skills.
- If you are currently studying to take the "old" exams, keep going. The current HSK levels 1-6 probably won't change before 2024, and the "new" levels 7-9 probably won't be released until March of 2022.
- Jump straight to the "New" HSK Vocabulary Lists. 🗷

P All the "New" HSK exam analyses and word lists that you see on the Internet (including this one!) are based on the recently-updated 'Chinese Proficiency Standards', which guide but do not define the requirements for the HSK exams. When official updates to the HSK requirements are published, we will update this article accordingly.

Read this Full Guide on the "New" HSK to Learn:

Why the HSK is changing Change #1: New HSK Exam Structure Change #2: New HSK Vocabulary Requirements Change #3: New HSK Grammar Requirements Change #4: Will Handwriting be Tested? Change #5: Other Requirements of the New HSK When will the New HSK Changes Take Effect? How Should You Practice for the New HSK Today? Key Takeaways

Why the HSK is Changing

- 1. To increase the difficulty to align it with internationally accepted language proficiency frameworks, like the CEFR (Common European Framework). The "Old" exam was often criticized for maxing out at an intermediate level.
- 2. To increase the accuracy in assessing one's Chinese language ability.
- 3. To modernize by retiring outdated words and phrases and by including new HSK vocabulary.

Change #1: New HSK Exam Structure

The most obvious change is the addition of three new levels: 7, 8, and 9:

"Old" HSK	"New" HSK	
Level 1	Level 1	
Level 2	Level 2	
Level 3	Level 3	
Level 4	Level 4	
Level 5	Level 5	
Level 6	Level 6	
	Level 7	New!
	Level 8	New!
	Level 9	New!

Unlike Levels 1-6 which have their own exams, Levels 7-9 will be a single exam, where your performance will determine which Level you receive.

The new Level 7-9 exams are not just more granular testing; they are substantially more difficult.

On the "Old" HSK, Level 6 was considered "advanced". On the "New" HSK, Level 6 is considered "intermediate":

"Old" HSK		"New" HSK		
Level 1	Decimpor	Level 1		
Level 2	Beginner	Level 2	Beginner	
Level 3	Intermediate	Level 3		
Level 4	Internediate	Level 4		
Level 5	Advanced	Level 5	Intermediate	
Level 6	Auvanceu	Level 6		
		Level 7	Advanced	
		Level 8		
		Level 9		

Of course, these are just labels. Chinese is not getting harder; rather, the criteria by which each proficiency title is applied are changing.

If you've passed HSK 6, your skills won't decrease simply because your level is now categorized differently.

Change #2: New HSK Vocabulary Requirements

You may have seen charts similar to this:

	"Old" HSK	"New" HSK	Change
Level 1	150	503	+353
Level 2	300	1,260	+960
Level 3	600	2,220	+1,620
Level 4	1,200	3,204	+2,004
Level 5	2,400	4,267	+1,867
Level 6	5,000	5,396	+396
Levels 7, 8, 9		11,017	

Charts like this can be misleading. While they do evaluate the *total* number of Chinese words you need to know, they ignore *which words* are found in each level. Which is important, because it doesn't matter if you know 5,000 words if they aren't

the words you will be tested on!

We've analyzed each Level from the new Chinese standards and compared them with the existing "Old" HSK exam. Pay attention to removals and additions:

	"Old" HSK	Removals	Additions	"New" HSK
Level 1	150	-13	+366	503
Level 2	300	-29	+989	1,260
Level 3	600	-68	+1,688	2,220
Level 4	1,200	-153	+2,157	3,204
Level 5	2,400	-396	+2,163	4,267
Level 6	5,000	-2,076	+2,472	5,396
Levels 7, 8, 9	No comparable	11,017		

Roughly speaking, about 10% of the HSK vocabulary (from the "old" exams) has been removed from Levels 1-4. In Level 5, about 15% was removed.

At HSK 6, a whopping 42% of the words were removed (2,076)!

If you thought you'd "only" have to learn 396 new words to go from the "old" HSK 6 to the "new" HSK 6, you're in for a surprise: you actually need to learn 2,472 new words!

Curious which words were removed from each level?

We were too! Here's what we found:

13 words re	moved f	rom HS	SK 1:				
↦ HSK 2:	出租车	分钟	怎么样	椅子	漂亮	狗	猫
↦ HSK 3:	前面	后面	苹果				
↦ HSK 4:	些						
Gone:	先生	喂					
make too ma levels 1-4. M important to • We are surp seem like im the exam, e	lost of the learn. rised to se portant we	transfer ee 先生 ar ords to k	s involve fre nd 喂 remov now. Our gu	equently- ed from a less is th	used wo all levels at they w	rds that of the H	are all ISK. These
29 words re	moved f	from H	SK 2				~
68 words re	moved f	from H	SK 3				~
153 words r	emoved	from H	ISK 4				~
396 words r	emoved	l from l	HSK 5				~

2,076 words removed from HSK 6

If you are tracking your vocabulary growth with Hack Chinese, you can identify exactly which words you already know from each New HSK level. Read more about analysing vocabulary lists.

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Change #3: New HSK Grammar Requirements

The New Standards document lists all the grammar requirements per level. Our team is at work analyzing this vs. the previous exams, and will update this section when we have more to share.

Looking at the number of patterns per level, it's safe to say each Level of the new exam will include more grammar patterns than were tested before.

Unlike with vocabulary, the new grammar patterns are unlikely to be "new" (not seen on the test before), but simply shifts from later levels to earlier levels.

Change #4: Will Handwriting be Tested?

The "New" Chinese Proficiency Standards list various forms of handwriting ability at every Level. If the HSK exams adopt these requirements, it will be even bigger news than the greatly expanded vocabulary requirements, as it will mean students not only need to recognize words, but know how to write them from memory.

We have some doubts that handwriting skill (as described in the standards

document) will be tested on the New HSK exam. More on that below.

First, let's see what the standards say:

- In Levels 1-3, "character-copying" is listed. Our interpretation of what this could look like is: see Chinese characters on the page/screen, and then reproduce them with a pen.
- In Levels 4-9, the word for "copying" is omitted, so we assume it means these Levels will test handwriting from memory instead.

Emphasis is given on understanding stroke order and character construction, and there are speeds listed for how quickly you should be able to write:

Handwriting Skill	Speed			
Copying	10 chars/min			
Copying	15 chars/min			
Copying	20 chars/min			
Writing from memory				
Writing from memory				
Writing from memory				
Writing from memory				
Writing from memory				
Writing from memory				
	Copying Copying Copying Writing from memory Writing from memory Writing from memory Writing from memory Writing from memory			

Why we aren't convinced handwriting will be required

Disclaimer: These are our opinions, not facts. We make a learning tool that helps students recognize characters, and have written at length why we think most students should probably not learn to handwrite characters.

The "Standards" are not the Exam Requirements

The "New" HSK Exam requirements (which have not yet been released) will be based on the new Chinese Proficiency standards, but won't necessarily be the same.

Our understanding is that the remit of the bodies who constructed the standards was to create a document that detailed what a non-native learner of Chinese should be able to do at various levels of proficiency.

This is a separate process from creating the actual HSK requirements, as the latter must be pragmatic when designing an exam that will be administered in thousands of testing centers worldwide.

Historical Precedent

On the "Old" (current) HSK exams, handwriting was optional.

While students *could* choose to take a paper-based exam and handwrite their answers, most students chose to take the computer-based exam which allowed them to type answers in Pinyin (and then choose characters via recognition).

Impact on Testing Centers

Requiring all test takers to engage in some form of handwriting would add considerable logistical costs to the exam administrators:

1. Every level of the New HSK exam would need a paper-based section, even if the rest of the exam was taken on a computer.

2. Most likely, humans would be required to grade this new section.

A Reduction in Relevance?

In the modern world, handwriting characters is not typically done outside the classroom; Pinyin + digital devices allow writing in Chinese (by recognition of characters).

If handwriting characters becomes an exam requirement, it may deter some students (who don't need the exam credential for work/school) from taking the exam at all.

If one was thinking of using the HSK as a way to benchmark their Chinese fluency, they might decide not to -- as spending a considerable amount of time learning a skill that you probably won't use after the exam has quite a large opportunity cost.

These factors lead us to have some doubts that a handwriting requirement will make the jump from the Standards to the actual HSK exam. Perhaps handwriting will be optional, like the "Old" (current) exam. Or perhaps it will be

tested only at the highest levels of the exam. Having said that, many Chinese language schools are convinced it will, so we will see!

Change #5: Other Requirements of the New HSK

Some online guides show charts of new character and even syllable requirements. We don't think these requirements are that important to focus on, as they are dominated by the vocabulary requirements. From our practical experience, by the time you know the vocabulary, you'll have learned these meta components anyway.

Put another way, given that the "New" Exam is attempting to more accurately measure language competency, we are confident that words (not individual characters or syllables) will be tested; not the meta components you'll learn along the way.

When will the New HSK Changes Take Effect?

The dates b becomes avail		le will update this as new information
New HSK	Earliest date given	
Levels 1-6	2024	
Levels 7-9	March 2022	

Until the "New" HSK Levels are given, you will still be able to register for the "Old" Exams, and the certificates you receive for passing will still be valid at institutions that require them (jobs, universities).

How Should You Practice for the New HSK Today?

If you are just getting started with Mandarin, don't worry about the New HSK exams yet. Following the current HSK lists, or any textbook series that your tutors recommend, or the outstanding curriculums from LTL Mandarin School and ExcelMandarin, or apps like Domino Chinese, will all be worthwhile.

If you planned to take the HSK Level 1-4 exam in the next 24 months, stick to your current plan. The New HSK Exam Levels most likely won't be given until 2024, so you should feel confident sticking with your current study methods, resources, and goals. If you're an intermediate/advanced student who plans to take HSK Exam Levels 5-9 **in the future**, start adding the New HSK vocabulary to your study plans. We have all the New HSK Level lists on Hack Chinese, so you can add those now and be ready

Key Takeaways

when the exams can be taken.

- Achieving a credential by taking the HSK examination can be an awesome motivator. But the real goal for most people is learning to communicate in Chinese, and *Chinese isn't changing*. Your favorite learning resources will work just as well tomorrow as they did yesterday.
- If you haven't yet passed the current HSK Level 6, then your study materials and exams aren't changing for years. Keep on learning the way you are now.
- Vocabulary is the "largest" component (by volume) of both the "Old" and "New" HSK exams. Make sure you have a solid strategy for learning Chinese vocabulary.
- If you have a Hack Chinese account, you can see exactly what percentage of the vocabulary from the New HSK exams you already know by viewing the "New" Exam Lists.

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