

北京第二外国语学院“校级教材建设立项”教材

# READING AND WRITING CHINESE CHARACTERS 认汉字, 写汉字

陈维琦 王 涛 / 编著  
(英) Attilia McCabe / 校译



旅游教育出版社

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The aim of this book is to help beginners learning Chinese to improve their reading and writing. We have selected 400 of the most commonly used characters in Chinese language textbooks. These 400 characters are divided into 20 lessons, 20 characters in each lesson.

Each lesson includes:

1. The description of the etymology of the characters which is based on authoritative studies. These descriptions help to understand the characters and can be used as a memory technique.
2. The presentation of each character in a square block. This helps to understand how to write the characters in a clear manner with the strokes in the correct order.
3. Word recognition practice. This helps to reinforce the understanding of each character and enables us to discover the meaning of new words.
4. Reading and writing practice. This helps to use the characters in a meaningful context. Most characters used in the example sentences appear at least 4 times.



# INTRODUCTION

Chinese writing, commonly known as a logographic writing system, has a history of over 5,000 years. Although it is not the only ancient writing system, it is the only one in the world still in use today that, despite a long evolution, remains faithful to its origins.

Logograms are visual symbols representing words rather than sounds or phonemes that make up words. The Chinese writing system has remained logographic for several practical reasons. In classical Chinese, most words were monosyllabic, so there were many homophones, and a logographic writing system could help to distinguish them. The Chinese language has been split into seven major dialects, phonetically very different. A uniform written language has helped maintain a unity in this vast country. At different times in history the Chinese characters were adopted by several neighbouring countries—Vietnam, Korea and Japan. Literate people in Japan and to a certain extent in South Korea and Vietnam can still read them. Despite the fact that the spoken language has evolved, the characters have remained a wide reaching means of communication.

Originally, Chinese characters represented existing objects with no reference to pronunciation. At present, nothing much remains of the figurative aspect, and the number of characters which contain a phonetic element has increased progressively. The writing system has evolved gradually and has been standardized, reformed and simplified. The majority of characters are semantic-phonetic compounds, which are composed of a semantic and a phonetic indicator.

The most frequently asked question by people learning Chinese is: how many characters does the average literate Chinese person know? Chart of Common Characters of Modern Chinese (现代汉语常用字表) lists 2,500 common characters and 1,000 less frequently used characters. These 3,500 characters cover 99.48% of a two-million word sample. How many characters are required to understand media material? Studies carried out in 2006 have shown that 581 characters can cover 80% of all kinds of media material, 934 characters 90% and 2,314 characters 99%. These statistics have enabled us to understand which characters we need to learn first.

## Characters and words

Chinese characters should not be confused with Chinese words. Every Chinese character either represents a word or a morpheme (the smallest meaningful unit of language). Not every word in modern Chinese is monosyllabic. The word for “country”, for example, is 国家(guójiā). Since this word has two syllables, it is necessary to write it with two characters. Each of these characters has an independent meaning: 国(guó) means “country”, and 家(jiā) means “home”. In modern Chinese 国(guó) cannot be used on its own as a word. Knowing the meanings of the individual characters of a word will often allow us to understand the general meaning of the word. The majority of modern Chinese words are written with two or more characters. In classical Chinese, most words were single-syllable words with a close correspondence between the characters and the words.

## Basic strokes of Chinese characters

In Chinese, the characters are often called 方块字(fāngkuàizì), literally “square characters”. Each character must occupy the same square area of space. Regardless of the number of features, all characters must be roughly the same size.

Far from being complicated drawings, Chinese characters are made up of simple single strokes and combined strokes. A stroke is a dot or a line which is drawn without lifting the pen from the writing surface. All strokes have a name and are written according to certain rules.

There are six single strokes:

Stroke	Name	Description	Examples
一	横héng	Horizontal stroke	一 三 大 十 五
丨	竖shù	Vertical stroke	中 本 车 你 牛
丿	撇piě	Leftward sloping stroke	力 人 千 女 午
㇏	捺nà	Rightward sloping stroke	八 文 大 木 衣
丶	点diǎn	Dot	主 六 不 我 太
㇀	提tí	Rightward rising stroke	我 汉 习 把 地

The length of a stroke depends on its position within the character. For example, the leftward sloping stroke and the rightward sloping stroke should descend far enough to provide a balanced base for the character.

A compound stroke is formed by lines that include one or more abrupt changes in direction. There are 5 groups of 26 compound strokes:

Stroke Group	Stroke	Name	Examples
折类 “Turning” Group	㇏	横折 héng zhé	口 目 马 要
	㇏	横折折 héng zhé zhé	凹
	㇏	横折折折 héng zhé zhé zhé	凸
	㇏	竖折 shù zhé	山 牙 叫 医
	㇏	竖折折 shù zhé zhé	鼎
撇类 “Leftward sloping” Group	㇏	撇点 piě diǎn	女 巡
	㇏	撇折 piě zhé	去 么 东 到
	㇏	横撇 héng piě	又 水 今 外
	㇏	横折折撇 héng zhé zhé piě	建 极
	㇏	竖折撇 shù zhé piě	专
提类 “Rightward-rising” Group	㇏	竖提 shù tí	以 比 很 食
	㇏	横折提 héng zhé tí	认 识
钩类 “Hook” Group	㇏	横钩 héng gōu	了 写 字 预
	㇏	横折钩 héng zhé gōu	习 包 力 也
	㇏	横折折折钩 héng zhé zhé zhé gōu	奶
	㇏	竖钩 shù gōu	小 水 事 椅
	㇏	竖折折钩 shù zhé zhé gōu	马 号 鸟 弓
	㇏	斜钩 xié gōu	我 找 试 武
	㇏	卧钩 wò gōu	心 必
	㇏	横折斜钩 héng zhé xié gōu	飞 风 气

续表

Stroke Group	Stroke	Name	Examples
弯类 “Bending” Group	㇏	弯钩 wān gōu	子 家 狗
	㇚	竖弯钩 shù wān gōu	儿 己 吧 比
	㇛	横折弯钩 héng zhé wān gōu	几 九
	㇜	横撇弯钩 héng piě wān gōu	阳 都
	㇝	横折弯 héng zhé wān	没 朵 船
	㇞	竖弯 shù wān	西 四 酒

### Basic stroke order

In order to write a character you must respect the way in which the lines are drawn as well as the order in which they are drawn. If you do not respect the direction of each stroke and the stroke order, the characters become illegible when they are written quickly. Stroke order also helps to learn and memorize the characters.

The most effective way to learn the rules concerning the direction of the stroke order is by practising, slowly at first, then getting faster as the stroke order becomes more familiar. Care must be taken in positioning the beginning and end of each stroke in order to write the characters correctly. By crossing or intersecting strokes that should not meet, it is possible to write a completely different character with a completely different meaning, for example, 己 and 已.

Basic stroke order	Examples
Horizontal stroke precedes vertical stroke	十 干 丰
“Leftward sloping” precedes “rightward sloping”	人 文 天
From top to bottom	三 土 主
From left to right	木 你 好
Middle stroke precedes the two side strokes	小 业 山
Outside strokes precede the inside strokes	问 月 肉
The inside strokes precede the sealing stroke	日 田 回
Dots last	我 书 玉



## Major types of character structure

The different possible combinations of making up characters are shown below:

Major type of character structure	Examples
Single body	女 人
Left-right structure	你 好
Top-bottom structure	男 息
Semi-enclosed from the lower left corner	这 还
Semi-enclosed from the upper left corner	屋 床
Semi-enclosed from the upper right corner	司 句
Enclosed on the left, top and right side	问 风
Enclosed on the left, bottom and right side	画 凶
Enclosed on the top, left and bottom side	医 区
Enclosed structure	回 国

## Essential points of handwriting

In order to write in a clear and legible manner, it is necessary to follow the basic rules of strokes, structure and balance, which determine the harmony, stability and aesthetics of the characters.

Essential point of handwriting	Examples
Balanced centre of gravity	多也易乃
Fine proportions	三天商等
Matching sides	明语您洗
Harmony between strokes, components, neighboring characters	并汉心点
Modification of radicals to create a more compact character	好林地孩

## Learning tips

1. The first step in learning to write is to observe the characters. It will help you become familiar with the characters as you discover this entirely unfamiliar form of writing.
2. Use paper with big squares.
3. Make yourself character flashcards with the pronunciation, words, and example sentences.

4. Apply the memory techniques mentioned in this book. The key is to find a relationship among the form, the pronunciation and the meaning of a character.
5. Test yourself at the end of each lesson to ensure that you can remember all the characters and how to write them with the strokes in the right order.
6. An effective way to test your progress is to check that you know the meaning of each character, that you can pronounce it correctly and that you can use it in a two-syllable word or in an expression or sentence from the corresponding dialogue.



<b>Lesson 1</b> .....	1
Characters: 人、女、子、马、口、日、田、月、土、力、 天、一、好、明、男、妈、吗、在、我、不	
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<b>Lesson 2</b> .....	9
Radicals: 亻、彳、讠、讠、口	
Characters: 山、王、大、夫、白、回、见、去、出、今、 五、也、的、她、他、你、很、汉、语、国	
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<b>Lesson 3</b> .....	19
Radicals: 辶、ナ、又、月、隹	
Characters: 心、门、书、朋、中、文、太、正、么、友、 有、坐、是、什、们、问、谁、难、这、您	
Practice .....	24
<b>Lesson 4</b> .....	28
Radicals: 宀、艹、亠、夕	
Characters: 生、上、下、小、少、几、个、午、早、习、 学、多、名、字、星、姓、叫、吃、饭、期	
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Radicals: 艹、艹、目、户、艹、冫	



Characters: 儿、木、手、方、首、本、要、看、间、老、  
杯、机、茶、英、那、哪、都、地、房、住

Practice ..... 44

### Lesson 6 ..... 48

Radicals: 寸、寸、才、贝、钅、戈

Characters: 水、果、高、行、平、斤、对、找、贵、听、  
课、苹、块、快、忙、时、晚、换、钱、银

Practice ..... 54

### Lesson 7 ..... 58

Radicals: 豕、匚、舌、石

Characters: 气、车、电、只、会、买、卖、号、话、道、  
家、汽、认、识、说、知、医、候、客、码

Practice ..... 64

### Lesson 8 ..... 68

Radicals: 系、纟、禾

Characters: 羊、工、身、用、东、系、西、关、体、累、  
给、谢、和、种、没、样、红、昨、作、怎

Practice ..... 74

### Lesson 9 ..... 78

Radicals: 立、灬、止、广

Characters: 自、包、长、司、商、己、同、师、典、里、  
走、位、床、站、点、店、起、饿、饱、词

Practice ..... 84

### Lesson 10 ..... 88

Radicals: 刂、八、父、匕、尸、酉、至

Characters: 刀、交、共、分、公、比、些、办、班、别、  
到、屋、法、室、爸、吧、呢、酒、校、较

Practice ..... 94



<b>Lesson 11</b> .....	99
Radicals: 耳、阝	
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Radicals: 一、爻、艹、舟、皿	
Characters: 毛、京、合、古、化、北、笔、事、等、拿、 写、喝、渴、适、答、故、做、教、盒、盘	
Practice .....	124
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Radicals: 辶、弓	
Characters: 言、片、干、安、全、冰、信、黑、冷、凉、 净、静、请、情、晴、清、照、热、张、桌	
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Radicals: 巾、页	
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Practice .....	154
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Radicals: 穴、彡、礻(示)	
Characters: 风、美、乐、易、票、音、思、相、容、花、 景、影、视、现、意、想、箱、空、踢、球	
Practice .....	164
<b>Lesson 18</b> .....	169
Radicals: 厂、戈	
Characters: 火、面、以、总、弟、可、式、宜、考、哥、 第、打、厅、停、楼、梯、数、姐、试、聪	
Practice .....	175
<b>Lesson 19</b> .....	179
Radicals: 矢、犮	
Characters: 豆、岁、然、年、兴、直、当、真、活、矮、 短、病、疼、瘦、节、应、该、孩、刻、过	
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Radicals: 礻、𠂇(爪)、犛	
Characters: 业、定、爱、库、香、算、就、条、毕、菜、 爬、裤、狗、猪、猜、钟、声、极、级、奶	
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# Dì Yī Kè LESSON 1

☆ This lesson includes 20 characters, which are typical of the five types of modern characters.

人	女	子	马	口	日	田	月	土	力
天	一	好	明	男	妈	吗	在	我	不

## PICTOGRAPHS (象形字 xiàng xíng zì)

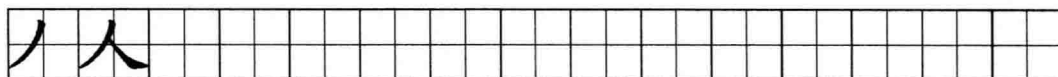
Pictographs are derived from pictures of concrete objects. This type of character is the basic unit for forming the Chinese script. In order to discover the character's origin, we start with the ancient writing script.



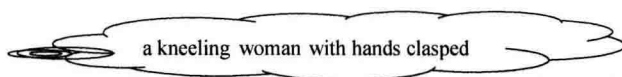
人

rén

person



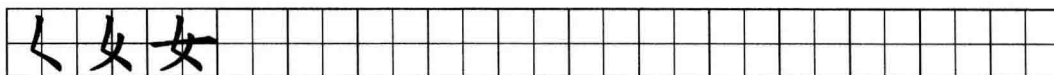
**Note.** The meaning given here is for each individual character. Knowing the meanings of the individual characters of a word will often allow us to understand the general meaning of the word. In some cases, however, the meaning of a word may be quite different from the meaning of the individual characters.



女

nǚ

woman



### WORD RECOGNITION PRACTICE:

1. 女 ( ) + 人 ( ) → 女人 ( )

**Note.** “女” cannot be used as a word on its own. The word for “woman” is 女人.

child

horse

mouth

sun

field

moon; month



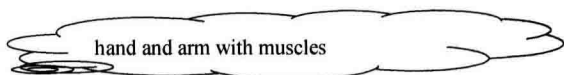
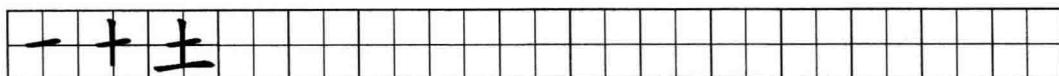
**Note.** A character may have a whole range of meanings, of which one is the original meaning, and the rest are figurative or extended meanings. Here “moon” is the original meaning of 月. “Month” is the extended one. In this book, the first meaning given is always the original one or the basic one.



土

tǔ

soil; earth



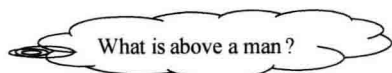
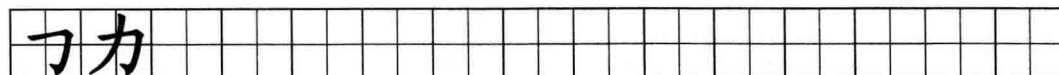
hand and arm with muscles



力

lì

strength



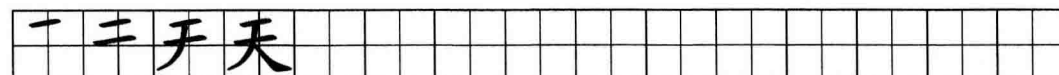
What is above a man?



天

tiān

sky; day



WORD RECOGNITION PRACTICE:

2. 一 ( ) + 天 ( ) → 一天 ( )

3. 天 ( ) + 天 ( ) → 天天 ( )

## IDEOGRAPHS (指事字zhǐshìzì)

Ideographs are simple diagrammatic indications of abstract ideas or concepts. This type of character is also the basic unit for forming the Chinese script. Ideographs and pictographs are