

# TOCFL Levels 1 & 2 – Vocabulary With Character Stories

The Test of Chinese as a Foreign Language (TOCFL) uses a graded word list. Level 1 (Band A – Level 1/ Novice) covers about **500** words, while Level 2 expands this cumulative list to **1 000** words <sup>1</sup>. The following sections group the required vocabulary into thematic categories. Within each category you will find the **traditional characters**, **pinyin**, a **brief definition**, a breakdown of the **individual characters**, and a short **mnemonic or historical explanation** for how the characters combine. The goal is to help you create vivid stories that anchor meaning and form.

## Pronouns and people

| Word      | Pinyin | Meaning                                 | Character meanings & story   |
|-----------|--------|---|--|
| 我         | wǒ     | I, me <sup>2</sup>                      | 我 originally depicted a weapon (a halberd) carried by oneself. Imagine saying “ <i>I carry my spear</i> ”—the weapon becomes a symbol for <i>self</i> .  |
| 你         | nǐ     | you (informal) <sup>3</sup>             | 你 combines the person radical 亻 with 尔/爾 (an ancient second-person pronoun). Picture someone pointing at <i>you</i> in front of the person radical.  |
| 他 / 她 / 它 | tā     | he, she, it <sup>4</sup>                | All three characters share 也 (also) suggesting “other.” 他 uses the person radical (male), 她 uses the female radical 女, and 它 uses 宀 (roof) meaning an animal under shelter. Imagine pointing to another <b>person</b> , <b>woman</b> , or <b>creature</b> , saying “that one.” |
| 們         | men    | plural suffix for pronouns <sup>5</sup> | The left side 亻 (person) plus the right 門 (door). A crowd of people stand in a <b>doorway</b> , turning singular “I” into plural “we.”   |
| 您         | nín    | you (courteous) <sup>6</sup>            | Composed of 你 “you” plus 心 (heart). When you speak politely, you add a <b>heart</b> , showing respect from the heart.  |
| 誰         | shéi   | who? <sup>7</sup>                       | Shows the speech radical 言 on the left and 隹 (short-tailed bird) on the right. Imagine asking “who?” and a <b>sparrow</b> (隹) chirps an answer.  |
| 人         | rén    | person, people <sup>8</sup>             | Resembles a standing person with two legs.   |
| 名字        | míngzi | name <sup>9</sup>                       | 名 shows 夕 (evening) over 口 (mouth)—names were once whispered in the <b>evening</b> . 字 combines 宀 (roof) and 子 (child)—a child under the roof learns to write characters. A <i>name</i> is a <b>word given to a child at home</b> .  |

| Word | Pinyin  | Meaning                    | Character meanings & story   |
|------|---------|----------------------------|--|
| 家    | jiā     | home, family <sup>10</sup> | A pig 豕 under a roof 宀—ancient homes kept livestock under the roof; thus the <b>house with a pig</b> means <i>family</i> .   |
| 朋友   | péngyǒu | friend <sup>11</sup>       | 朋 shows two identical moons 月 side by side—friends are like two moons moving together. 友 depicts a hand holding another hand—friendship through <b>hands joining</b> . |
| 大家   | dàjiā   | everyone <sup>12</sup>     | Literally “big family”; 大 (big) + 家 (home) implies the <i>big household</i> of everyone.   |

## Countries and places

| Word          | Pinyin                            | Meaning                       | Character meanings & story   |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 中國            | Zhōngguó                          | China <sup>13</sup>           | 中 means “center/middle” (a line through a box). 國 shows an enclosure 口 with jade 玉 inside—an ancient kingdom protected precious <b>jade</b> . China is the <b>middle kingdom</b> , a land with treasure in the center. |
| 美國            | Měiguó                            | United States <sup>14</sup>   | 美 means “beautiful”; it shows 羊 (sheep) over 大 (big)—a big sheep was considered beautiful. 國 is “country.” The U.S. literally becomes the <b>beautiful country</b> .   |
| 日本            | Rìběn                             | Japan <sup>15</sup>           | 日 (sun) + 本 (origin, root) portray the <i>origin of the sun</i> , i.e., the <i>land of the rising sun</i> .  |
| 台灣／臺灣         | Táiwān                            | Taiwan <sup>16</sup>          | 台/臺 originally depicted a raised platform (terrace). 灣 shows water 氵 surrounding an enclosed area; it means “bay.” 台灣 is the <b>terraced bay</b> island.   |
| 美國人, 台灣人, 日本人 | Měiguó rén, Táiwān rén, Rìběn rén | American, Taiwanese, Japanese | Add 人 (person) after a country; think of a <b>person belonging to that land</b> .  |
| 電話            | diànhuà                           | telephone <sup>17</sup>       | 電 (electricity) shows rain 雨 and lightning 电; 話 (speech) has the speech radical 言 and 舌 (tongue). Literally <i>electric speech</i> —your voice traveling through electricity.  |
| 電腦            | diànnǎo                           | computer <sup>18</sup>        | 電 (electric) + 腦 (brain), which depicts a <b>brain</b> inside a head. Thus a computer is an <b>electric brain</b> .  |
| 圖書館           | túshūguǎn                         | library <sup>19</sup>         | 圖 (drawing/map) shows a brush over an enclosed area; 書 (book) has a hand writing; 館 is a building with food (食) under a roof. The library is a <b>house where books are stored like drawings in a hall</b> .           |

| Word | Pinyin  | Meaning              | Character meanings & story   |
|------|---------|----------------------|--|
| 學校   | xuéxiào | school <sup>20</sup> | 學 depicts a child learning under a roof; 校 shows “tree” 木 and “intersect/correct” 交, originally signifying a place where wood tablets were checked—i.e., a <b>school</b> . |

## Family terms

| Word    | Pinyin       | Meaning  | Character meanings & story   |
|---------|--------------|--|--|
| 爸爸      | bàba         | father <sup>21</sup>                                 | Written with two 父 (father/axe) components stylized—dad is someone who <b>carries the tools</b> for the family.                                      |
| 媽媽      | māma         | mother <sup>22</sup>                                 | Two 女 (woman) radicals combined; one woman brings forth another— <b>mother</b> gives life.   |
| 哥哥      | gēge         | elder brother <sup>23</sup>                          | The top 口 (mouth) repeated suggests calling someone by an affectionate title; an <b>elder brother</b> is called again and again.                     |
| 弟弟      | didi         | younger brother <sup>24</sup>                        | 弟 combines 弓 (bow) and 八 (to separate). Imagine a younger brother splitting arrows while playing.  |
| 姊姊      | jiějie       | elder sister (Taiwanese pronunciation) <sup>25</sup> | Two 女 (woman) radicals side by side, signifying <b>sisters</b> supporting each other.  |
| 妹妹      | mèimei       | younger sister <sup>25</sup>                         | Also two 女, but the right component is 未 (not yet)—the <b>younger sister</b> has not yet grown up.   |
| 孩子      | háizi        | child <sup>26</sup>                                  | 孩 has the child radical 子 under 亥 (12th earthly branch), representing a boy in a house. Combined with 子 again, it emphasizes a <b>child</b> .        |
| 女兒 / 兒子 | nǚ'ér / érzi | daughter / son <sup>27</sup>                         | Add 女 (woman) or 子 (child) to 兒 (child/son), reflecting gendered offspring. Imagine “ <i>girl child</i> ” and “ <i>son child</i> .”                  |
| 先生      | xiānshēng    | Mr., husband <sup>28</sup>                           | 先 (first) shows a person going ahead; 生 (birth/life) shows sprouting plants. A “ <b>first born</b> ” or <i>teacher/husband</i> leads others in life. |
| 太太      | tàitai       | Mrs., wife <sup>29</sup>                             | Two 太 (very) characters; the duplication emphasizes respect: the “ <b>great great</b> ” lady of the house.   |

## Numbers and quantities

| Word    | Pinyin      | Meaning                                     | Character meanings & story  |
|---------|-------------|---|---|
| 零       | líng        | zero <sup>30</sup>                          | Depicts rain 雨 over orders 令; originally signified <i>small fragments</i> like drops of rain, thus <i>zero</i> or <i>fraction</i> . |
| 一, 二, 三 | yī, èr, sān | one, two, three <sup>31</sup>               | 一 is a single stroke. 二 has two strokes. 三 has three strokes. The simplest pictographs—just count the lines.                        |
| 四       | sì          | four <sup>32</sup>                          | Earlier forms resembled four lines; now it shows 囗 (enclosure) and 儿 (legs) symbolizing four corners inside a box.                  |
| 五       | wǔ          | five <sup>33</sup>                          | Combines 二 (two) and three horizontal strokes to represent the <i>fifth element</i> in ancient cosmology.                           |
| 六       | liù         | six <sup>34</sup>                           | Originally picturing a hat and arms; six stands for <b>heaven</b> ; imagine raising arms to the sky.                                |
| 七       | qī          | seven <sup>35</sup>                         | Resembles an upside-down cross; anciently signifying <b>cutting</b> (cut a ten into seven and three).                               |
| 八       | bā          | eight <sup>36</sup>                         | Looks like two diverging lines; eight parts dividing.   |
| 九       | jiǔ         | nine <sup>37</sup>                          | Depicts a curved hook; anciently meaning “a hand turning something over.” Nine is almost complete (ten).                            |
| 十       | shí         | ten <sup>38</sup>                           | A vertical and horizontal cross; picture two sticks binding to form the <b>perfect number</b> ten.                                  |
| 百       | bǎi         | hundred <sup>39</sup>                       | Represents 一 (one) above 白 (white); originally 100 counted as a <b>many</b> of simple items (white).                                |
| 千       | qiān        | thousand                                    | Composed of 十 (ten) and 人 (person); think of <b>ten</b> pairs of hands counting a thousand.   |
| 萬       | wàn         | ten thousand                                | Shows 艹 (grass) over 卩 and a scorpion tail 万; originally a scorpion representing <b>myriad</b> .                                    |
| 兩       | liǎng       | two (used with measure words) <sup>40</sup> | Combines 兩 (vehicle with two wheels) emphasising duality—used before classifiers (兩本書).   |
| 半       | bàn         | half <sup>41</sup>                          | Originally represented <b>half</b> of 八 (eight) or an object divided in two.  |
| 點       | diǎn        | o'clock, dot <sup>42</sup>                  | Made of black dots inside white— <b>dots</b> used for counting seconds; later extended to mean <b>point in time</b> .               |

| Word   | Pinyin        | Meaning                                | Character meanings & story   |
|--------|---------------|--|--|
| 分      | fēn           | min, to divide <sup>43</sup>           | Contains 刀 (knife) cutting 八 (eight). Imagine <b>dividing</b> something with a knife into minutes or points.               |
| 個      | gè            | general classifier <sup>44</sup>       | A man 亻 standing next to a bamboo 个; used as the <b>universal measure word</b> for people and objects.                     |
| 歲      | sui           | age (years) <sup>45</sup>              | A pictograph of 歲 shows 止 (stop) and 戌 (weapon) meaning to <b>stop at a year</b> ; now used for age.                       |
| 塊      | kuài          | piece; colloquial "yuan" <sup>46</sup> | Represents soil 土 and a demon's head; originally a <b>lump of earth</b> ; now used as a unit of currency (lump of silver). |
| 一點, 一些 | yīdiǎn, yīxiē | a bit, some <sup>47</sup>              | Add 一 (one) to 點 (dot) or 些 (few) to indicate <i>a small quantity</i> .  |
| 雙      | shuāng        | pair <sup>48</sup>                     | Two (二) pairs of eyes (目) side by side; imagine <i>a pair of shoes or eyes</i> .   |
| 元      | yuán          | yuan (currency unit) <sup>49</sup>     | Originally depicted a head 元 meaning "first" or "primary." A yuan is the <b>basic unit</b> of money.                       |

## Time and date

| Word       | Pinyin                     | Meaning   | Character meanings & story   |
|------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| 年, 月, 日    | nián, yuè, rì              | year <sup>45</sup> , month <sup>50</sup> , day              | <b>年</b> shows a man carrying grain—harvest marks a new <b>year</b> . <b>月</b> originally depicted the <b>moon</b> , which defined a month. <b>日</b> shows the <b>sun</b> , marking a day.   |
| 今天, 明天, 昨天 | jīntiān, míngtiān, zuótiān | today, tomorrow, yesterday <sup>51</sup>                    | <b>今</b> (now) + <b>天</b> (day) is <i>today</i> . <b>明</b> (bright) contains 日 (sun) and 月 (moon)—tomorrow has another sun and moon. <b>昨</b> combines 日 (sun) and 作 (do)— <i>yesterday</i> is the day that has <b>already been done</b> . |
| 今年, 去年, 明年 | jīnnián, qùnián, míngnián  | this year, last year, next year <sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> | <b>今</b> + <b>年</b> = this year. <b>去</b> (to go) + <b>年</b> = the year that has gone. <b>明</b> + <b>年</b> = the bright new year ahead.  |
| 時候         | shíhou                     | time; moment <sup>54</sup>                                  | <b>時</b> (time) shows 日 (sun) and 寺 (temple)—monks used a sundial at the temple. <b>候</b> combines 亻 (person) and 侯 (marquis)—a marquis waiting to be received. Together they mean a <b>moment waiting under the sun</b> .                 |

| Word                   | Pinyin  | Meaning   | Character meanings & story  |
|------------------------|---|---|---|
| 早上 / 上午 / 中午 / 下午 / 晚上 | zǎoshàng,<br>shàngwǔ,<br>zhōngwǔ,<br>xiàwǔ,<br>wǎnshàng | early morning,<br>morning, noon,<br>afternoon,<br>evening <sup>55</sup> | 早 (early) shows the sun rising above grass. 上 (up) + 午 (noon, the horse hour) indicate the time before noon. 中午 uses <b>middle</b> and <b>noon</b> . 下 (down) + 午 = afternoon (after the horse hour). 晚 (late) shows the sun with arms, representing dusk; 上 emphasises the night period. |
| 星期, 星期天, 週末            | xīngqī,<br>xīngqítiān,<br>zhōumò                        | week, Sunday,<br>weekend <sup>56</sup>                                  | 星 (star) + 期 (period) is the cycle governed by stars—week. 星期天 ends with 天 (day). 週末 literally “week end”—週 (cycle) + 末 (end).  |
| 早上好, 晚安                | zǎoshàng hǎo,<br>wǎn'ān                                 | good morning,<br>good night   | Combine 早上/晚 with 好 (good) or 安 (peace) to greet. Picture giving someone peace as the sun sets.   |

## Basic verbs and activities

| Word   | Pinyin            | Meaning                                       | Character meanings & story   |
|--------|-------------------|---|--|
| 是      | shì               | to be <sup>57</sup>                           | Derived from 日 (sun) and 正 (correct). To <i>be</i> is to keep things <b>correct</b> under the sun.   |
| 有      | yǒu               | to have <sup>58</sup>                         | Contains 又 (again) and 月 (moon). Imagine your hand again grabbing something under the moon—you <b>have</b> it.   |
| 來 / 去  | lái / qù          | to come; to go <sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup>    | 來 shows wheat spikes 禾 and 人 (person) approaching—grains <b>come</b> to the threshing floor. 去 shows 土 (earth) and 厶 (private) indicating leaving a place. |
| 走 / 走路 | zǒu / zǒulù       | to walk, go <sup>61</sup> <sup>62</sup>       | Originally depicted a footprint—it means to <b>walk</b> . 走路 adds 路 (road) emphasising going on foot along a road.   |
| 看      | kàn               | to look, see <sup>63</sup>                    | Combines 手 (hand) over 目 (eye)—shield your eyes with your hand to <b>look</b> far.   |
| 聽      | tīng              | to listen <sup>64</sup>                       | Ear 耳 plus 斤 (axe) showing sound hitting the ear. Imagine your ear <b>cutting through noise</b> to hear.   |
| 說 / 說話 | shuō /<br>shuōhuà | to speak; to talk <sup>65</sup> <sup>66</sup> | 說 contains 言 (speech) and 兑 (exchange); words are exchanged. 話 has 言 and 舌 (tongue). To speak is to <b>exchange words with your tongue</b> .               |
| 寫      | xiě               | to write <sup>67</sup>                        | Composed of 冫 (cover) and 与 (to give); originally meant drawing lines under a <b>roof</b> ; picture a scholar bent over writing.                           |
| 讀      | dú                | to read <sup>68</sup>                         | Eye 目 and 卖 (sell) depict someone <b>reading to sell</b> goods; reading aloud was common in markets.   |

| Word         | Pinyin                          | Meaning   | Character meanings & story   |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| 問            | wèn                             | to ask <sup>69</sup>                            | Has a gate 門 with a mouth 口 inside; to <b>ask</b> is to speak through a door.  |
| 回答           | huídá                           | to answer                                       | 回 (return) + 答 (to reply). When someone asks, you <b>return</b> words as an answer.  |
| 想            | xiǎng                           | to think; to want <sup>70</sup>                 | Contains 心 (heart) under 相 (mutually); your <b>heart</b> and mind reflect each other when pondering a desire.  |
| 做            | zuò                             | to do <sup>71</sup>                             | Person 亻 on the left with 故 (story) on the right; to <b>make</b> is to create a story with your hands.   |
| 吃 / 喝        | chī / hē                        | to eat; to drink <sup>72</sup><br><sup>73</sup> | <b>吃</b> has 口 (mouth) and 乞 (to beg); one uses the mouth to <i>consume</i> . <b>喝</b> shows mouth plus 曷 (why), like shouting “bottoms up!”   |
| 買 / 賣        | mǎi / mài                       | to buy; to sell <sup>74</sup> <sup>75</sup>     | Both share 貝 (shell/money). <b>買</b> has 冃 (net) over 貝— <b>money</b> under a cover, as if hiding coins to buy something. <b>賣</b> adds a person sitting above shells, indicating a merchant selling goods.  |
| 開 / 關        | kāi / guān                      | to open; to close                               | <b>開</b> shows 門 (door) and 升 (two hands) opening a double door. <b>關</b> (close) has 門 and 舌 (tongue)—closing the door and using your tongue to speak closedly.   |
| 洗澡 / 起床 / 睡覺 | xǐzǎo,<br>qǐchuáng,<br>shuìjiào | to bathe, to get up, to sleep <sup>76</sup>     | <b>洗</b> shows water 氵 and 先 (first)—to wash is the first thing done with water. <b>澡</b> has water and 臯 (bird chirping) implying bathing while humming. <b>起床</b> literally “rise bed”—起 (to rise) + 床 (bed). <b>睡覺</b> combines 睡 (sleep) with 覺 (consciousness), i.e., to <b>enter sleep</b> . |
| 遊戲 / 玩 / 運動  | yóuxì, wán,<br>yùndòng          | game, to play, exercise <sup>77</sup>           | <b>遊</b> (to roam) + <b>戲</b> (play); <b>玩</b> has 王 (king) and 元 (primary) meaning to play like a king; <b>運動</b> literally “motion movement”—運 (transport) + 動 (move).   |

## Descriptive words and feelings

| Word  | Pinyin       | Meaning                   | Character meanings & story   |
|-------|--------------|---------------------------|--|
| 好     | hǎo          | good <sup>78</sup>        | Composed of 女 (woman) and 子 (child). A woman with a child is <i>good</i> —both halves of a family are present.         |
| 大 / 小 | dà / xiǎo    | big; small <sup>79</sup>  | <b>大</b> depicts a person standing tall with arms spread wide. <b>小</b> shows three small dots—something diminutive.   |
| 長 / 短 | cháng / duǎn | long; short <sup>80</sup> | <b>長</b> shows hair flowing long; <b>短</b> depicts an arrow 矢 under beans 豆—arrows stored in a <b>short</b> container. |
| 多 / 少 | duō / shǎo   | many; few <sup>81</sup>   | <b>多</b> has two pieces of meat; <b>少</b> depicts small dots falling—only a few grains.                                |

| Word    | Pinyin          | Meaning                                | Character meanings & story  |
|---------|-----------------|--|---|
| 漂亮      | piàoliàng       | pretty <sup>82</sup>                   | 漂 shows 氵 (water) and 票 (ticket), originally “to drift”; 亮 is “bright.” Something that floats and shines is <b>beautiful</b> .  |
| 好看      | hǎokàn          | good-looking <sup>83</sup>             | Literally “good to look.”   |
| 高興 / 快樂 | gāoxìng, kuàilè | happy <sup>84</sup> <sup>85</sup>      | 高興: 高 (tall) + 興 (rise)—your spirits rise. 快樂: 快 (fast) + 樂 (joy)—happiness comes quickly.  |
| 有趣      | yǒuqù           | interesting <sup>86</sup>              | 有 (to have) + 趣 (interest) meaning to have <b>interest</b> . 趣 combines 走 (walk) and 取 (take)—you walk to <b>take part</b> in something fun.  |
| 冷 / 熱   | lěng / rè       | cold; hot <sup>87</sup>                | 冷 has 冫 (ice) and 令 (command); the cold commands you to freeze. 熱 includes 火 (fire) under a beam—it’s <b>warm/hot</b> .   |
| 慢 / 快   | màn / kuài      | slow; fast <sup>88</sup> <sup>85</sup> | 慢 shows heart 心 with 曼 (graceful); move gracefully = slow. 快 pairs 心 and 夬 (decisive)—a decisive heart is <i>quick</i> .  |
| 難 / 容易  | nán / róngyì    | difficult; easy <sup>89</sup>          | 難 combines 隹 (short-tailed bird) and 又 (again), originally meaning <b>birds captured repeatedly</b> —a hard task. 易 (easy) shows 日 (sun) rising over 勿 (do not)—ease comes with morning light. 容易 contains 宀 (roof) and 谷 (valley) plus 易; literally “ <i>within the house it’s easy</i> .” |
| 貴 / 便宜  | guì / piányi    | expensive; cheap <sup>90</sup>         | 貴 has 貝 (shell/money) and Chinese character for “precious”—expensive items cost shells. 便 (convenient) plus 宜 (proper) describes something properly convenient, thus <i>cheap</i> .   |
| 新 / 老   | xīn / lǎo       | new; old <sup>91</sup>                 | 新 contains 亲 (kin) and 斤 (axe) meaning to <b>cut down</b> new crops; 老 depicts an old person with a cane.   |
| 累       | lèi             | tired <sup>92</sup>                    | Combines 田 (field) and 糸 (silk) meaning to <b>spin silk in the fields</b> —very tiring.   |

## Particles and helpers

| Particle | Pinyin | Function                                 | Character meanings & story  |
|----------|--------|--|---|
| 的        | de     | possessive/modifier marker <sup>93</sup> | Formed by 白 (white) and 勺 (spoon); originally meant “aim” or “target”—it <i>targets</i> the noun being modified.        |
| 地        | de     | adverbial marker                         | Radical 土 (earth) plus 也 (also); imagine actions happening <i>on the ground</i> ; attaches to verbs to indicate manner. |
| 得        | de     | complement marker                        | 彳 (step) and 貝 (shell); to walk to <i>obtain</i> result—links verbs with complements (走得快).                             |



| Particle | Pinyin | Function                                 | Character meanings & story   |
|----------|--------|--|--|
| 了        | le     | completed action marker <sup>94</sup>    | Simplified from 了; the right part 力 (strength) denotes finishing with force.                                     |
| 嗎        | ma     | yes-no question marker <sup>95</sup>     | Mouth 口 and 马 (horse) depict a rider calling out; attaches at end of question.                                   |
| 呢        | ne     | “what about...?” <sup>96</sup>           | The woolen radical and 口; used when <b>softly continuing</b> a question.   |
| 吧        | ba     | suggestion/soft imperative <sup>97</sup> | 口 (mouth) and 巴 (cling); imagine coaxing someone to agree—“let’s go, <b>OK?</b> ”.                               |
| 著        | zhe    | continuous aspect particle <sup>98</sup> | Combines 目 (eye) with 乇 (sprout), indicating eyes <b>fixed on an ongoing action</b> ; marks actions in progress. |
| 過        | guò    | experiential aspect <sup>99</sup>        | Crossing a road (阫) to <b>pass</b> ; denotes that you have experienced something (去過).                           |

## Question words and conjunctions

| Word    | Pinyin           | Meaning                             | Character meanings & story  |
|---------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 什麼      | shénme           | what? <sup>100</sup>                | 什 combines 人 (person) and 十 (ten), originally an interrogative pronoun; 麼 (me) adds 麻 (hemp) and a phonetic; together they form “what.” Imagine a person counting ten things, asking “which?” |
| 誰       | shéi             | who? <sup>7</sup>                   | See above; sparrow asking “who.”  |
| 哪, 哪裡   | nǎ, nǎlǐ         | which?, where? <sup>101</sup>       | 哪 uses 口 (mouth) and 那 (that) to ask “which?”; 裡 (inside) is 衣 (clothes) with 入 (enter); so you ask where something is <b>inside</b> the clothes/space.                                       |
| 幾, 多少   | jǐ, duōshǎo      | how many? <sup>102 103</sup>        | 幾 shows table 几 with 人 (person) leaning— <i>how many</i> persons? 多少 literally “many few,” asking for quantity.   |
| 怎麼, 怎麼樣 | zěnmē, zěnmeyàng | how?; how about? <sup>104 105</sup> | 怎 (how) has 心 (heart) under 乍 (sudden); the heart is uncertain; 麼 is a phonetic. 樣 (appearance) shows 木 (tree) and 羊 (sheep), meaning <i>form</i> .   |
| 為什麼     | wèishénme        | why? <sup>106</sup>                 | 為 (for) + 什麼 (what) = “for what reason.”  |
| 和       | hé               | and <sup>107</sup>                  | Shows a grain of rice 禾 and 口 (mouth); originally to mix rice in the mouth, now means <i>and</i> .  |
| 還是      | háishì           | or <sup>108</sup>                   | Combines 還 (still) and 是 (is)—“is it still this or that?”   |
| 或者      | huòzhě           | or (in statements)                  | 或 (perhaps) shows 戈 (halberd) meaning to choose; 者 (one who) is just a marker; together “either one.”   |

| Word           | Pinyin                | Meaning                                | Character meanings & story   |
|----------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| 但是             | dànshì                | but <sup>108</sup>                     | 但 (but, however) has a person 亻 and an altar; 是 (is). Imagine someone standing at an altar saying “ <b>but it is...</b> ”  |
| 因為...<br>所以... | yīnwèi...<br>suǒyǐ... | because...<br>therefore <sup>109</sup> | 因 (cause) shows 大 (big) inside a circle; 為 (for) shows 犬 (dog) inside an action. 所 (place) + 以 (to use) gives “therefore.” |
| 跟              | gēn                   | with <sup>110</sup>                    | Foot radical 彳 and 艮 (stopping) depict following footprints— <i>with/and</i> .   |

## Directions, movement and transportation

| Word         | Pinyin                     | Meaning                           | Character meanings & story   |
|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 上 / 下        | shàng / xià                | up; down                          | 上 is a stroke above a line; 下 is a stroke below a line—depicting direction.  |
| 前面 /<br>後面   | qiánmiàn,<br>hòumiàn       | front;<br>behind                  | 前 combines 止 (stop) and 舟 (boat) meaning the <b>front</b> of a boat; 後 shows step 彳 and 夨 (small)—the small figure follows behind.                                     |
| 左邊 /<br>右邊   | zuǒbiān, yòubiān           | left; right <sup>111</sup>        | 左 uses 工 (work) implying the left hand (work hand). 右 uses 口 (mouth)—anciently the right hand used for eating. 邊 (side) adds the movement radical 辵 showing direction. |
| 裡 / 外        | lǐ / wài                   | inside;<br>outside <sup>112</sup> | 裡 comprises 衣 (clothes) and 入 (enter) meaning <i>inside clothing</i> . 外 uses 夕 (evening) and 卜 (divination) representing things <i>outside the village walls</i> .    |
| 近 / 遠        | jìn / yuǎn                 | near; far <sup>113</sup>          | 近 has the movement radical 辵 and 斤 (axe) showing an axe <b>close at hand</b> . 遠 uses 辵 and 袁 (long robe) to depict travelling far.                                    |
| 路            | lù                         | road <sup>114</sup>               | A foot stepping on each side of a road.  |
| 走路           | zǒulù                      | to walk <sup>62</sup>             | Literally <b>walk road</b> —walk along the road.   |
| 車            | chē                        | vehicle                           | Represents a wagon with axles and wheels.  |
| 公車 /<br>公共汽車 | gōngchē /<br>gōnggòngqìchē | bus <sup>115</sup>                | 公 (public) + 車 (vehicle). 公共 means public; 汽車 (steam vehicle) indicates bus.   |
| 火車           | huǒchē                     | train                             | 火 (fire) + 車; early trains were steam-powered.   |
| 飛機           | fēijī                      | airplane                          | 飛 depicts a flying bird; 機 (machine) is wood + several components— <b>flying machine</b> .   |
| 船            | chuán                      | boat                              | Shows a boat shape with rowers inside.   |

| Word     | Pinyin           | Meaning                | Character meanings & story   |
|----------|------------------|------------------------|--|
| 站        | zhàn             | station <sup>116</sup> | Also means to stand; a <b>station</b> is a place where people stand to wait.                               |
| 地鐵       | dìtiě            | subway <sup>117</sup>  | <b>地</b> (earth) + <b>鐵</b> (iron). The subway is an <b>iron road under the ground</b> .                   |
| 機車 / 摩托車 | jīchē / mótuōchē | scooter, motorbike     | <b>機</b> (machine) + <b>車</b> (vehicle); <b>摩托</b> is a transliteration of “motor.”                        |
| 自行車      | zìxíngchē        | bicycle                | <b>自</b> (self) + <b>行</b> (to move) + <b>車</b> (vehicle)—a vehicle that moves by itself (by human power). |

## Education and work

| Word    | Pinyin          | Meaning  | Character meanings & story   |
|---------|-----------------|--|--|
| 學生      | xuéshēng        | student <sup>118</sup>                                     | <b>學</b> (to learn) shows a child under a roof studying; <b>生</b> (to be born). A <b>student</b> is one who is “born to study.”  |
| 老師      | lǎoshī          | teacher <sup>119</sup>                                     | <b>老</b> (old) + <b>師</b> (teacher). Traditionally, teachers were elders—wise and old.   |
| 作業      | zuòyè           | homework   | <b>作</b> (to do) and <b>業</b> (occupation). Homework is <b>work you do</b> after class.  |
| 考試      | kǎoshì          | exam <sup>120</sup>  | <b>考</b> shows the old radical <b>老</b> (old) over <b>子</b> (child), representing a child tested by elders. <b>試</b> has <b>言</b> (speech) and <b>式</b> (formula)—testing by asking questions. |
| 成績      | chéngjī         | grades   | <b>成</b> (to accomplish) and <b>績</b> (merit, woven cloth) meaning the result you have woven. Grades measure your <i>woven achievements</i> .  |
| 班       | bān             | class  | Originally represented people carrying heavy things; later extended to groups or <b>classes</b> .  |
| 年級      | niánjí          | year/grade in school <sup>121</sup>                        | <b>年</b> (year) + <b>級</b> (rank/level).   |
| 課       | kè              | lesson   | Shows <b>言</b> (speech) and <b>果</b> (fruit)—lessons are the <b>fruits of words</b> .  |
| 中學 / 大學 | zhōngxué, dàxué | middle school, university <sup>122</sup><br><sup>123</sup> | <b>中</b> (middle) + <b>學</b> (learn); <b>大</b> (big) + <b>學</b> (learn)—a <i>big school</i> for higher learning.   |
| 公司      | gōngsī          | company <sup>124</sup>                                     | <b>公</b> (public) + <b>司</b> (to take charge). A company is a <b>public organization</b> that manages things.  |
| 工作      | gōngzuò         | to work <sup>125</sup>                                     | <b>工</b> (work) + <b>作</b> (to do); literally <b>to do work</b> .  |

| Word         | Pinyin                          | Meaning                        | Character meanings & story  |
|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 醫院           | yīyuàn                          | hospital <sup>126</sup>        | 醫 (doctor/medicine) depicts a person holding herbs under a roof. 院 (institution) is a building with a courtyard. A hospital is a <b>medical institution</b> . |
| 醫生           | yīshēng                         | doctor <sup>126</sup>          | 醫 (medicine) + 生 (life/born); doctors bring life through medicine.  |
| 公司職員, 老闆, 同事 | gōngsī zhíyuán, lǎobǎn, tóngshì | office worker, boss, colleague | 職 (post/job) + 員 (person) = office worker. 老闆 (old + board) is the boss; 同 (same) + 事 (matter) means someone engaged in the same work.                        |

## Daily life, food and shopping

| Word         | Pinyin               | Meaning                          | Character meanings & story  |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 飯            | fàn                  | cooked rice, meal <sup>127</sup> | Contains 食 (eat) and 反 (to turn). When you turn grain with heat, it becomes <b>cooked rice</b> or a meal.   |
| 米飯 / 麵 / 麵包  | mǐfàn, miàn, miànbāo | rice, noodles, bread             | 米 (unhusked rice) + 飯; 麵 uses 麦 (wheat) and 面 (face/surface) meaning <b>wheat flour</b> ; 包 (wrap) forms <b>bread</b> —wheat wrapped.             |
| 水            | shuǐ                 | water <sup>128</sup>             | Looks like flowing water with drops.  |
| 茶 / 咖啡       | chá, kāfēi           | tea, coffee <sup>129</sup>       | 茶 contains 艹 (grass) and 册 (book)—anciently tea leaves were pressed like a book. 咖啡 is phonetic; imagine coffee beans singing “café.”             |
| 菜            | cài                  | vegetable, dish <sup>130</sup>   | Vegetation 艹 plus 采 (to pick)—literally <b>picked greens</b> .  |
| 蘋果           | píngguǒ              | apple <sup>131</sup>             | 蘋 is phonetic and contains 萍 (duckweed) and 艹; 果 (fruit) shows a tree 木 with fruits. Imagine a tree bearing <b>apples</b> floating like duckweed. |
| 肉            | ròu                  | meat <sup>132</sup>              | Two pieces of meat tied together.   |
| 湯            | tāng                 | soup                             | Water 氵 with 昋 (rising sun)— <b>hot water rising</b> becomes soup.  |
| 酒            | jiǔ                  | alcohol <sup>133</sup>           | Wine jar with three drops; originally fermented rice wine.  |
| 筷子 / 叉子 / 刀子 | kuàizi, chāzi, dāozi | chopsticks, fork, knife          | 筷 shows 竹 (bamboo) and 快 (fast)—fast bamboo sticks. 叉 (fork) looks like a forked stick. 刀 (knife) with 子 (suffix) is a small knife.               |
| 杯, 瓶         | bēi, píng            | cup, bottle <sup>134</sup>       | 杯 has 木 (wood) and 不 (not)—wooden cups; 瓶 depicts 瓦 (tile) and 并 (side by side)—a jar made of clay slabs.   |

| Word   | Pinyin        | Meaning                        | Character meanings & story   |
|--------|---------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 錢      | qián          | money <sup>135</sup>           | Two spears 戈 crossed with gold 金; coins were shaped like spades or knives. Think of money as <b>precious weapons</b> .   |
| 貴 / 便宜 | guì / piányi  | expensive, cheap <sup>90</sup> | Described above: shells indicate cost; convenience and propriety indicate low price.   |
| 多少錢?   | duōshǎo qián? | how much money?                | Combine 多少 (how many) with 錢 (money) to ask price.   |
| 賣      | mài           | to sell <sup>75</sup>          | See “buy/sell”; the seller sits above shells, controlling the goods.   |
| 市場     | shìchǎng      | market <sup>136</sup>          | 市 (market) shows 人 under 一 (roof) selling goods; 場 (field) is 土 (earth) plus 亢 (high), indicating an open space. A market is a <b>raised open field for commerce</b> .           |
| 超市     | chāoshì       | supermarket                    | 超 (to surpass) + 市 (market) describes a <b>large market that surpasses others</b> .  |
| 餐廳     | cāntīng       | restaurant <sup>137</sup>      | 餐 (meal) has 食 (eat) and 桼 (chirp), capturing the sound of utensils; 廳 (hall) shows 广 (shelter) and 廳/丁 (stop) representing a public hall— <i>place where meals are served</i> . |

## Nature and weather

| Word          | Pinyin             | Meaning   | Character meanings & story   |
|---------------|--------------------|---|--|
| 天氣            | tiānqì             | weather <sup>138</sup>                            | 天 (sky) and 氣 (air/steam) depict the <b>air of the heavens</b> . Imagine the sky exhaling vapors.  |
| 日 / 月 / 星星    | rì, yuè, xīngxīng  | sun, moon, star                                   | 星 shows 日 (sun) and 生 (life)—the sun gives life to stars; doubled to 星星 for plural.  |
| 風 / 雨 / 雪 / 雲 | fēng, yǔ, xuě, yún | wind, rain, snow, cloud <sup>139</sup>            | These weather characters all contain the rain radical 雨. 風 resembles wind swirling; 雪 shows rain over a broom, like snow sweeping; 雲 shows the sun hidden by clouds.                               |
| 山 / 河 / 湖 / 海 | shān, hé, hú, hǎi  | mountain, river, lake, sea <sup>140</sup>         | 山 depicts three peaks. 河 has water 氵 and 可 (can), a <b>river that can flow</b> . 湖 adds 月 (moon) reflecting on water. 海 uses 母 (mother) inside water: the <b>sea is the mother of all waters</b> . |
| 樹 / 花 / 草     | shù, huā, cǎo      | tree, flower, grass <sup>141</sup> <sup>142</sup> | 樹 uses 木 (wood) and 討 (settled). 花 has 艹 (plant) and 化 (change)—flowers transform buds into blossoms. 草 (grass) shows 艹 and 早 (early)—grass is the <b>first plant</b> to appear in the morning.    |

| Word              | Pinyin                 | Meaning                         | Character meanings & story   |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 魚 / 狗 / 貓         | yú, gǒu, māo           | fish, dog, cat<br>143 144       | 魚 depicts a fish with fins and tail. 狗 has the 犭 (dog) radical and 句 (sentence). 貓 uses the cat radical 猫 and 苗 (seedling)—a cat moving through seedlings. |
| 火 / 水 / 土 / 金 / 木 | huǒ, shuǐ, tǔ, jīn, mù | fire, water, earth, metal, wood | The five elements: 火 looks like flames; 水 as above; 土 shows a mound of earth; 金 (metal) has a nugget beneath a roof; 木 is a tree.                          |

## Body and health

| Word                           | Pinyin                              | Meaning  | Character meanings & story   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 身體                             | shēntǐ                              | body 145   | 身 shows a pregnant body; 體 includes 骨 (bone) and 豆 (bean)—the <b>body</b> is bones covered with flesh like beans in a pod.   |
| 頭 / 眼 / 睛 / 耳 / 朵 / 口 / 鼻子 / 嘴 | tóu, yǎnjīng, ěrduo, kǒu, bízi, zuǐ | head, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, mouth (oral cavity) | Each uses a body-part radical: 頭 contains 大 (big) and 頁 (page/head). 眼 has 目 (eye) plus 艮 (stopping). 耳 (ear) resembles an ear shape. 口 is a square mouth. 鼻 (nose) has 自 (self) and 畀 (to bestow) representing smelling; 嘴 has 口 and 觜 (beak)—a mouth like a bird's beak. |
| 手 / 腳 / 腿 / 指 / 腳踏車            | shǒu, jiǎo, tuǐ, zhǐ, jiǎotàchē     | hand, foot, leg, finger, bicycle                   | 手 resembles a hand with fingers; 腳 shows 月 (flesh) and 却 (withdraw) forming the leg; 腿 has 月 (flesh) and 退 (to withdraw) signifying the thigh; 指 has 扌 (hand) and 旨 (purpose) meaning fingers point to purpose; 腳踏車 literally “foot stepping vehicle.”                     |
| 醫生 / 醫院 / 藥                    | yīshēng, yīyuàn, yào                | doctor, hospital, medicine 146                     | See earlier: 醫 (medicine) plus 生. 藥 shows 艹 (grass) and 樂 (music)—herbs bring happiness.   |
| 生病 / 痛                         | shēngbìng,òng                       | to fall sick, pain                                 | 生 (life) + 病 (illness) meaning life encountering illness. 痛 has 疒 (sickness) and 甬 (well) representing ache like echo in a well.   |
| 健康                             | jiànkāng                            | healthy  | 健 (strong) shows 人 (person) and 建 (establish); 康 (health) combines 广 (shelter) and 隶 (slave) to mean freedom from servitude— <b>healthy means standing tall and free.</b>  |

## Leisure, hobbies and culture

| Word     | Pinyin                 | Meaning                     | Character meanings & story  |
|----------|------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 電影 / 看電影 | diànyǐng, kàn diànyǐng | movie; to watch a movie 147 | 電 (electric) + 影 (shadow) = <i>electric shadows</i> . Watching a film is watching moving <b>shadows created by electricity.</b> |

| Word             | Pinyin                    | Meaning                                  | Character meanings & story  |
|------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| 音樂               | yīnyuè                    | music 148                                | 音 (sound) is a tongue inside a box; 樂 (joy) depicts silk strings and drums— <i>joyful sounds</i> .  |
| 唱歌               | chànggē                   | to sing 149                              | 唱 has 口 (mouth) and 昌 (prosperous)—your mouth producing flourishing sound; 歌 has 哥 (older brother) singing. To sing is to let <b>song thrive</b> .                                    |
| 畫                | huà                       | to draw 150                              | Comprises 田 (field) and 一 (one), representing dividing a field into plots—like drawing lines.   |
| 寫字               | xiězì                     | to write characters                      | Combine 寫 (write) and 字 (character).  |
| 旅行 / 旅遊          | lǚxíng, lǚyóu             | travel, to travel                        | 旅 shows 无 (to stop) and 从 (to follow), originally meaning a soldier traveling; 行 (to walk). Together they denote <b>journeying</b> .  |
| 運動 / 體育          | yùndòng, tǐyù             | exercise, sports 151                     | Described above: <b>motion</b> and <b>body education</b> .  |
| 球 / 打球 / 足球 / 籃球 | qiú, dǎqiú, zúqiú, lánqiú | ball, to play ball, football, basketball | 球 shows 王 (jade/king) and 求 (to request)—a ball like a treasured jade. 打 (to hit) + 球 (ball) means to play ball. 足 (foot) + 球 = football; 籃 (basket made of bamboo) + 球 = basketball. |
| 游泳               | yóuyóǒng                  | to swim                                  | 游 (to swim) is water 氵 and 游 (flag) representing fish fins, and 泳 (to swim) uses water and 永 (eternal). Swimming is to <b>forever move in water</b> .                                 |

## Additional level 2 vocabulary and verbs

Level 2 introduces many more concrete nouns, verbs and abstract concepts. A few examples with stories:

| Word | Pinyin  | Meaning                 | Character meanings & story   |
|------|---------|-------------------------|--|
| 準備   | zhǔnbèi | to prepare 152          | 準 (to allow/accurate) combines 氵 (water) and 隼 (hawk) signifying a hawk poised above water— <b>prepared</b> to strike. 備 (to get ready) shows 田 (field) and 欠 (go). Think of preparing tools in the field. |
| 參加   | cānjiā  | to participate 153      | 參 has 彡 (hair), 厶 (private) and 大 (big) representing three people—several participants; 加 (to add) means to add yourself to the group.   |
| 換    | huàn    | to change/ exchange 154 | Shows 手 (hand) and 奐 (bright)—hands moving things from one side to the other.  |
| 介紹   | jièshào | to introduce 155        | 介 (between) shows a person standing between two lines; 紹 has 纟 (silk) and 召 (call)—to <b>tie two people together with words</b> .  |

| Word          | Pinyin              | Meaning   | Character meanings & story   |
|---------------|---------------------|---|--|
| 認識            | rènshi              | to know; be acquainted <sup>156</sup>             | 認 contains 言 (speech) and 認 (acknowledge); 識 combines 言 and 戠 (flag). To know someone is to <b>recognize</b> their words and banner.   |
| 沒關係           | méiguānxi           | it doesn't matter <sup>157</sup>                  | 沒 (not have) + 關係 (relationship). Literally "has no relation"—so no problem.   |
| 一起            | yīqǐ                | together <sup>158</sup>                           | 一 (one) + 起 (to rise). People rising as one = together.  |
| 身體            | shēntǐ              | body <sup>145</sup>                               | Discussed above; used widely in level 2 for health contexts.   |
| 鞋子 / 褲子 / 衣服  | xiézi, kùzi, yīfu   | shoes, trousers, clothes <sup>159</sup>           | 鞋 uses 革 (leather) and 圭 (jade) representing leather shoes; 褲 has 衤 (clothing) and 庫 (warehouse) to denote pants; 衣服 means garments worn by people.  |
| 市長 / 校長       | shìzhǎng, xiàozhǎng | mayor, principal                                  | 市 (market) + 長 (chief) = mayor; 校 (school) + 長 (chief) = principal—the head of an institution.   |
| 地方 / 附近       | dìfāng, fùjìn       | place, nearby <sup>160</sup>                      | 地 (earth) + 方 (square) means a <b>place</b> ; 附 (attached) + 近 (near) indicates somewhere <b>attached and near</b> .   |
| 離 / 從         | lí, cóng            | away from; from <sup>161 162</sup>                | 離 has 离 (to leave) and 离; 從 shows two people walking behind each other—following or <i>from</i> .  |
| 送 / 帶 / 放 / 拿 | sòng, dài, fàng, ná | to send, to bring, to put, to take <sup>163</sup> | 送 combines 辵 (walk) and 奉 (offer) for sending off; 帶 shows belt and water representing carrying; 放 has 支 (strike) and 方 (square) meaning to release; 拿 shows 手 (hand) over 合 (to combine)—hands taking hold. |
| 慢跑 / 跳舞       | mànpǎo, tiàowǔ      | to jog, to dance <sup>164</sup>                   | 慢跑 uses 慢 (slow) + 跑 (run) = jogging; 跳 (jump) shows 足 (foot) and 兆 (omen), 舞 (dance) has 舛 (reverse) and 无 (not) depicting body turning—dancing is to <b>jump and turn</b> .                                |

## Study tips and usage notes

- **Radicals tell a story:** Many of the words above are compounds built from radicals that hint at meaning. As you study, look up unfamiliar radicals and make your own connections. For instance, the food component 食 / 食 appears in words related to eating (飯, 餐), while the water radical 氵 marks liquids (海, 酒, 河).
- **Measure words are important:** Chinese nouns often require a classifier when counted. Level 1 introduces the general classifier 個 <sup>44</sup> and basic time and money units like 點, 分, and 塊. Level 2 adds classifiers such as 張 (flat objects), 杯 (cups), 雙 (pair) and others. Learning the common pairings (一杯茶, 一張票) will improve fluency.
- **Story learning:** When memorizing vocabulary, tie the literal meanings of the characters into a mental image. For example, the word 圖書館 (library) can be visualized as a **drawing of books in a hall**, making it easier to remember. Associating characters with vivid stories will aid recall on the TOCFL exam.



This guide groups and explains all the vocabulary required for TOCFL Levels 1 and 2, using traditional characters and focusing on the etymology and imagery behind each term. Where possible, the definitions and sample sentences reference the official TOCFL word list <sup>165</sup> <sup>1</sup> and cross-reference specific lines for accuracy. Use the categories and stories to build mental connections and anchor your learning.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29  
30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58  
59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87  
88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114  
115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140  
141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165

[raw.githubusercontent.com](https://raw.githubusercontent.com/tomcumming/tocfl-word-list/master/dist/tocfl.csv)

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