

# ◀ Introduction to Chinese characters

## 1. What is a Chinese character?

Chinese characters - 汉字 are tools for recording the Chinese language, a type of script with symbolic features. Over thousands of years of history, Chinese characters have undergone many changes. Currently, the common shapes of Chinese characters include four types: **pictograms**, **ideograms**, **compound ideograms**, and **phonetic loan characters**.



## Basic Chinese characters

### 1. Horizontal stroke

How to write: A straight horizontal stroke drawn from **left to right**.

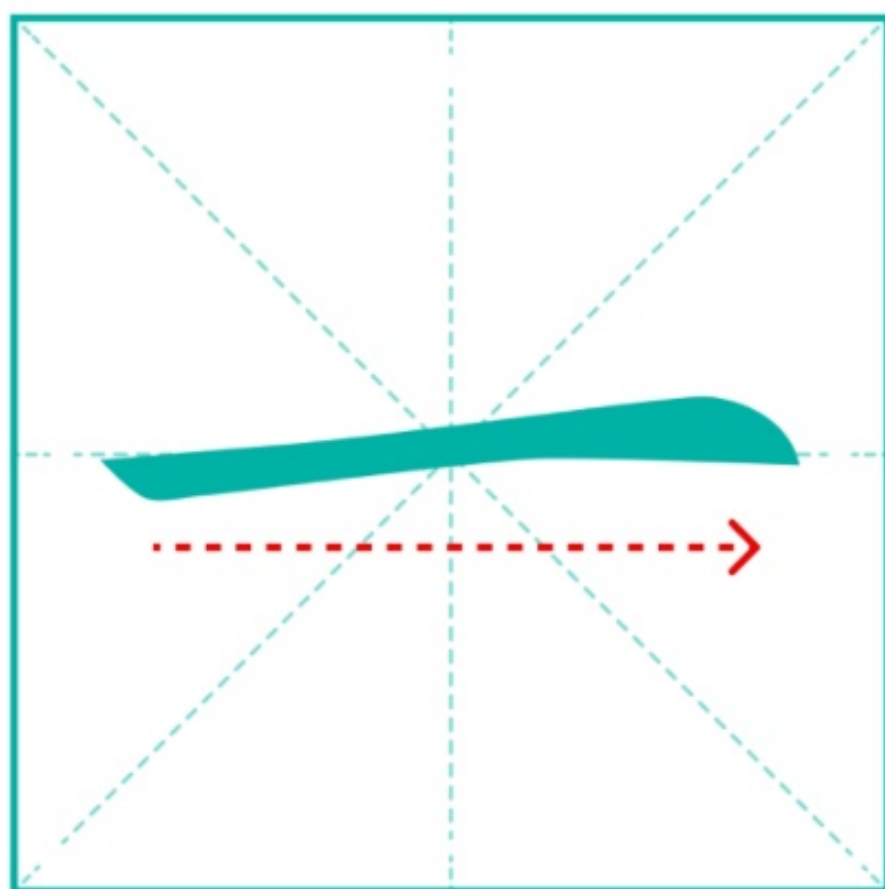
Examples:

王/wáng/: king, ruler

二(èr): number 2

工: /gōng/: worker, work

Illustration:





## Basic Chinese characters

### 2. Vertical stroke

How to write: A straight vertical stroke drawn from **top to bottom**.

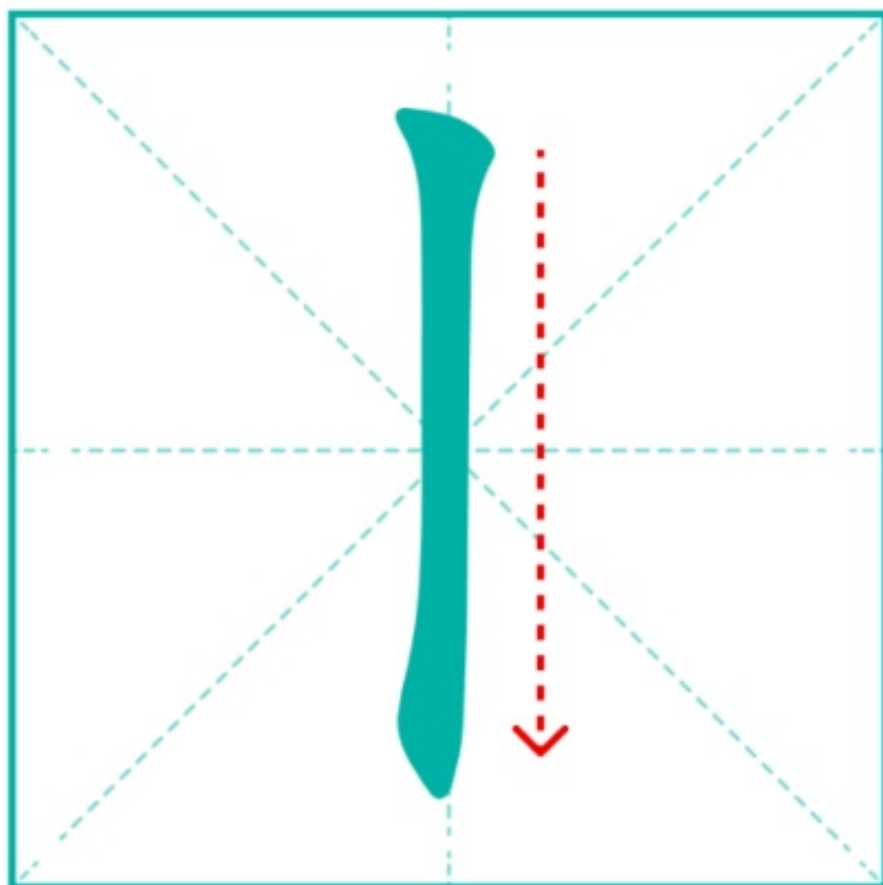
Examples:

十/shí/: number 10

中/zhōng/: center, middle

丰/fēng/: abundant, plentiful

Illustration:





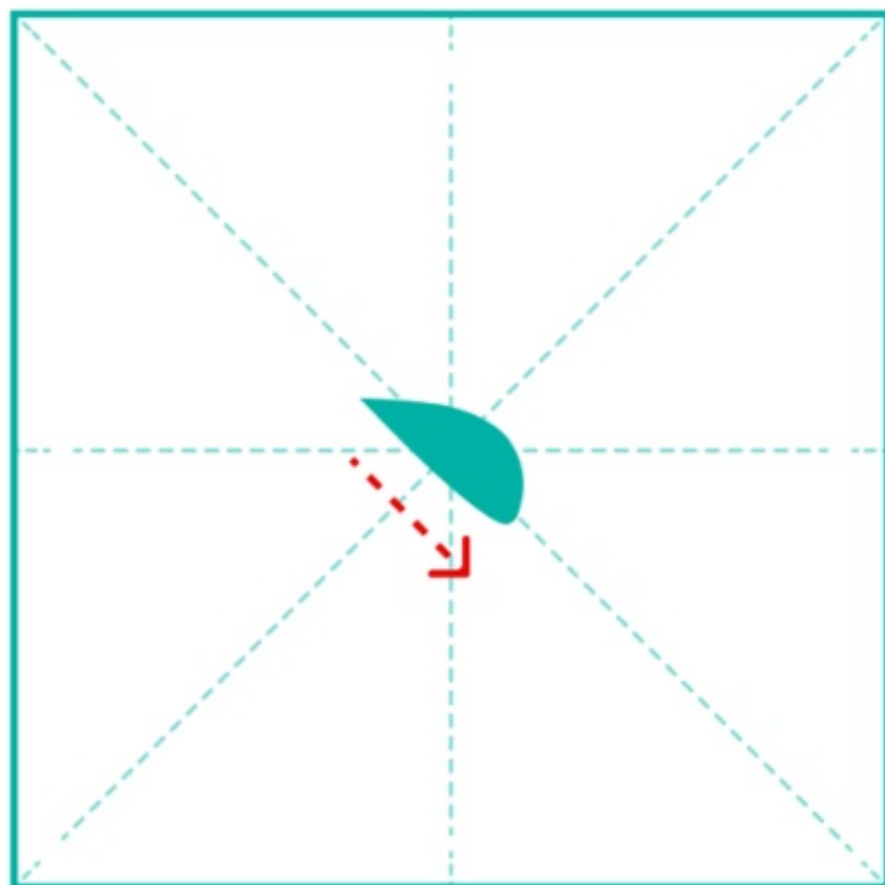
How to write: A dot drawn from **top** to **bottom**.

立/lì/: stand

文: /wén/: literature

头:/tóu/: head

Illustration:





## Basic Chinese characters

### 4. Upward Hook stroke

How to write: A curved stroke that goes upward from **left to right**.

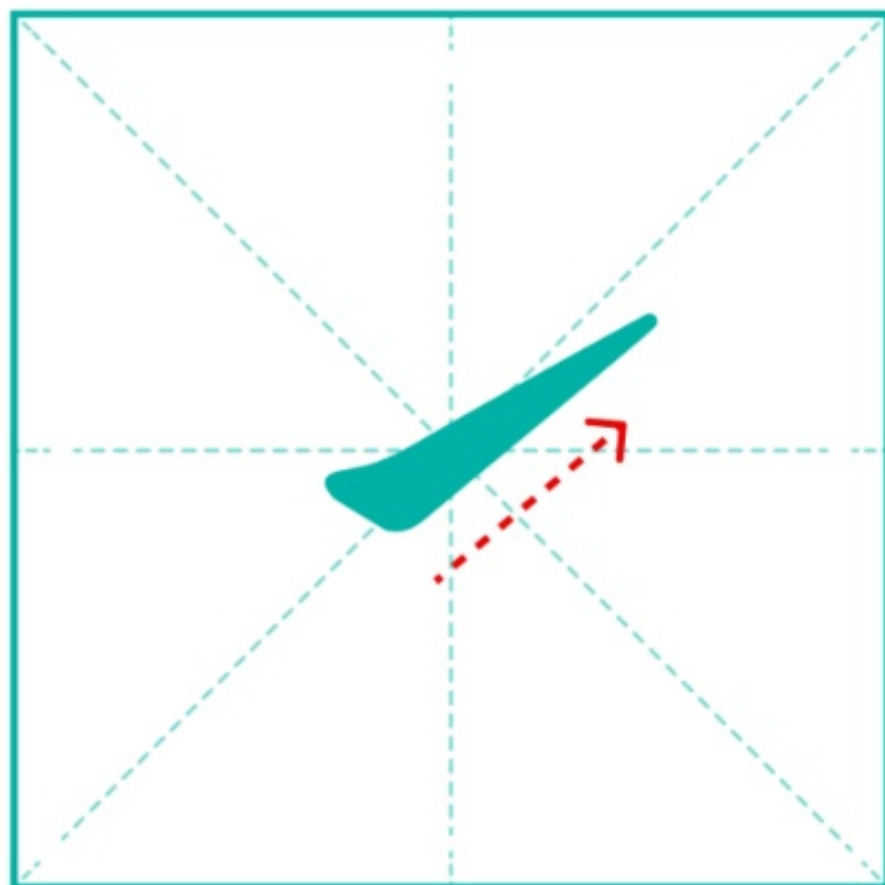
Examples:

冰/bīng/: ice

湖/hú/: lake

冷/lěng/: cold

Illustration:





## Basic Chinese characters

### 5. Left Slant stroke

How to write: A curved stroke drawn downward from **right to left**.

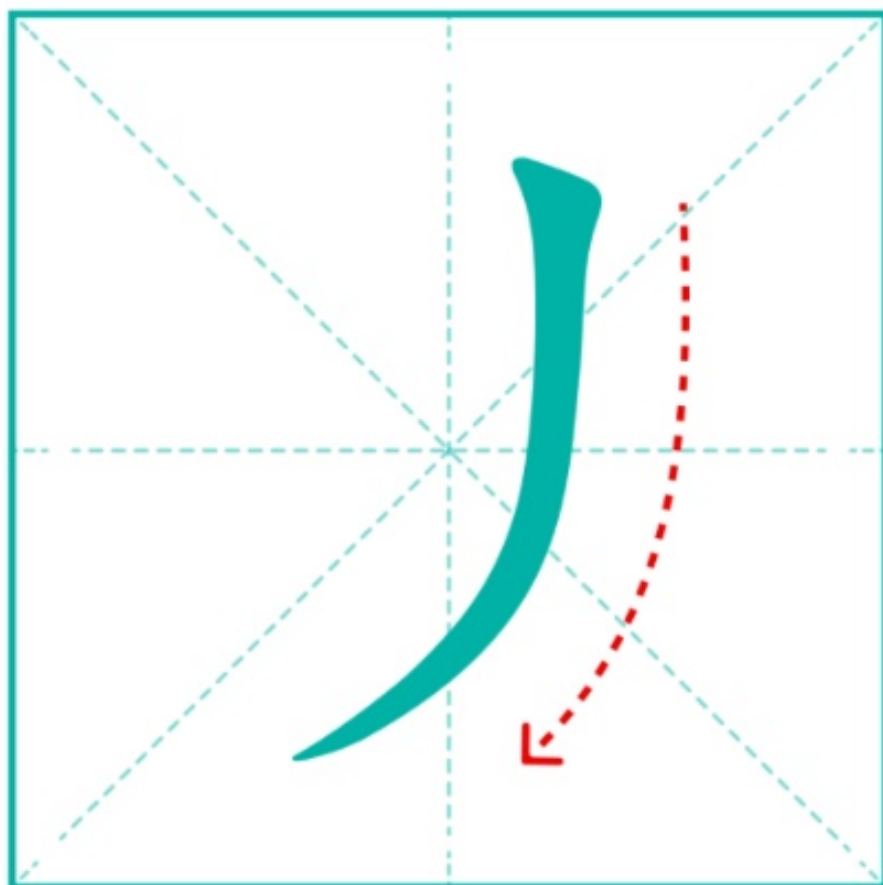
Examples:

八/bā/: number 8

顺/shùn/: smooth, compliant

行/xíng/: okay

Illustration:





## Basic Chinese characters

### 6. Right Slant stroke

How to write: A straight stroke drawn downward from **left to right**.

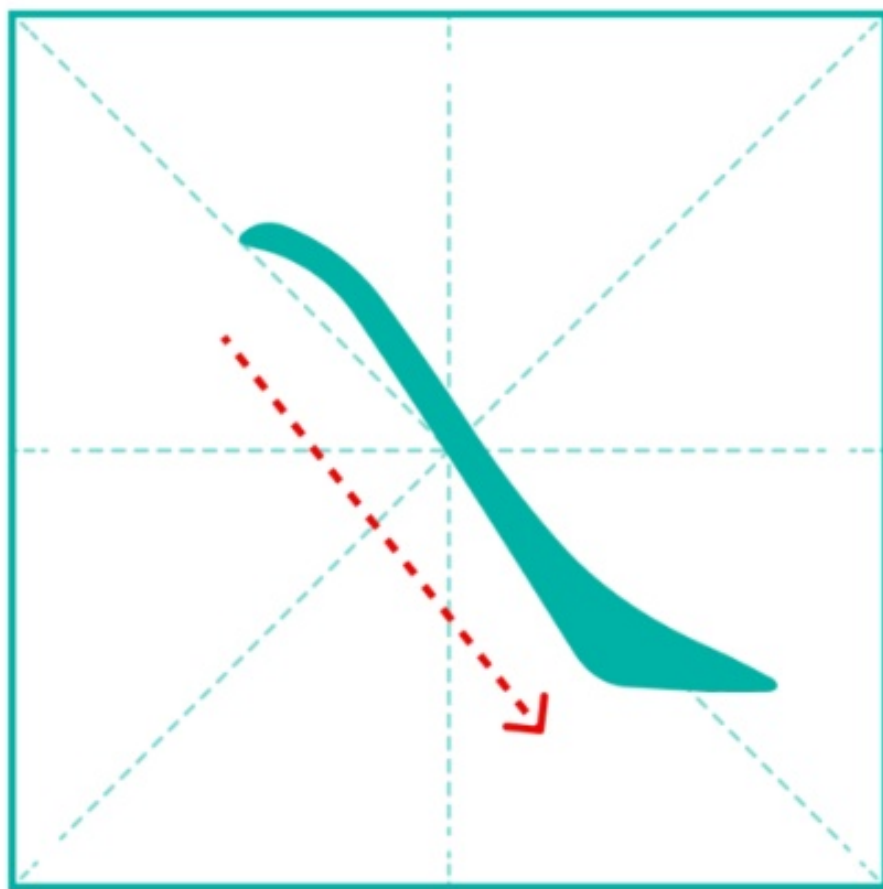
Examples:

入/rù/: enter

夫/fū/: husband

伞/sǎn/: umbrella

Illustration:







## Basic Chinese characters

### 7. Fold stroke

How to write: A stroke with a fold in the middle.

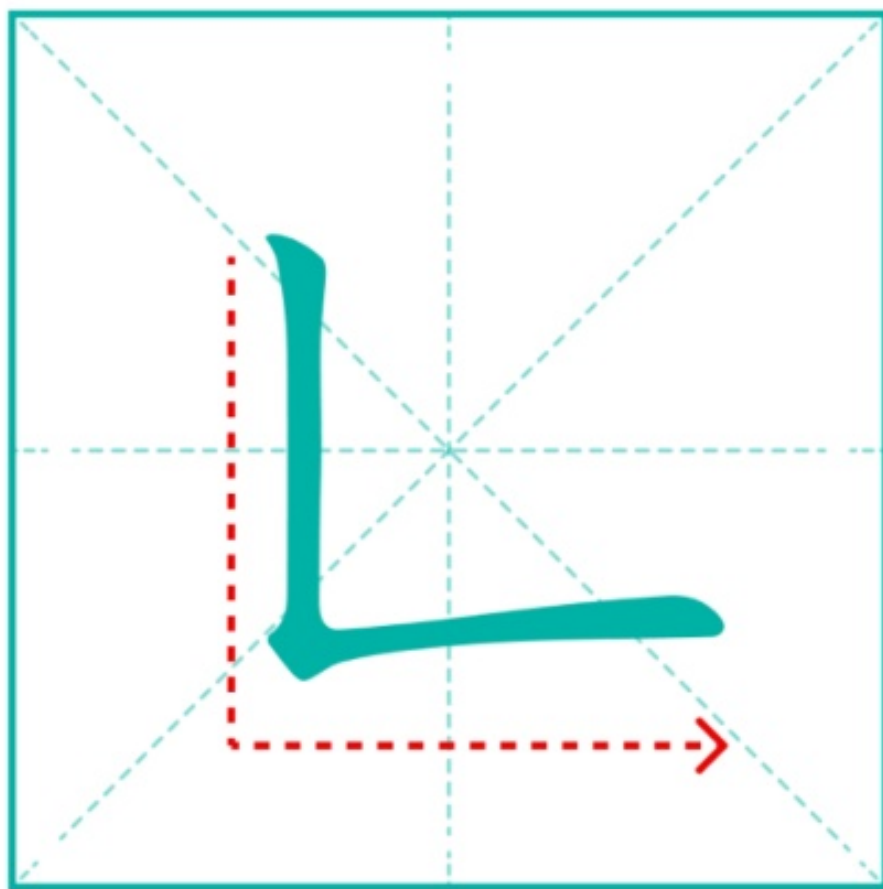
Examples:

区 /qū/: distinguish, separate

凹 /āo/: concave, sunken

鼎 /dǐng/: tripod, cauldron

Illustration:







## Basic Chinese characters

### 8. Hook stroke

How to write: A stroke with a hook at the end of other strokes.

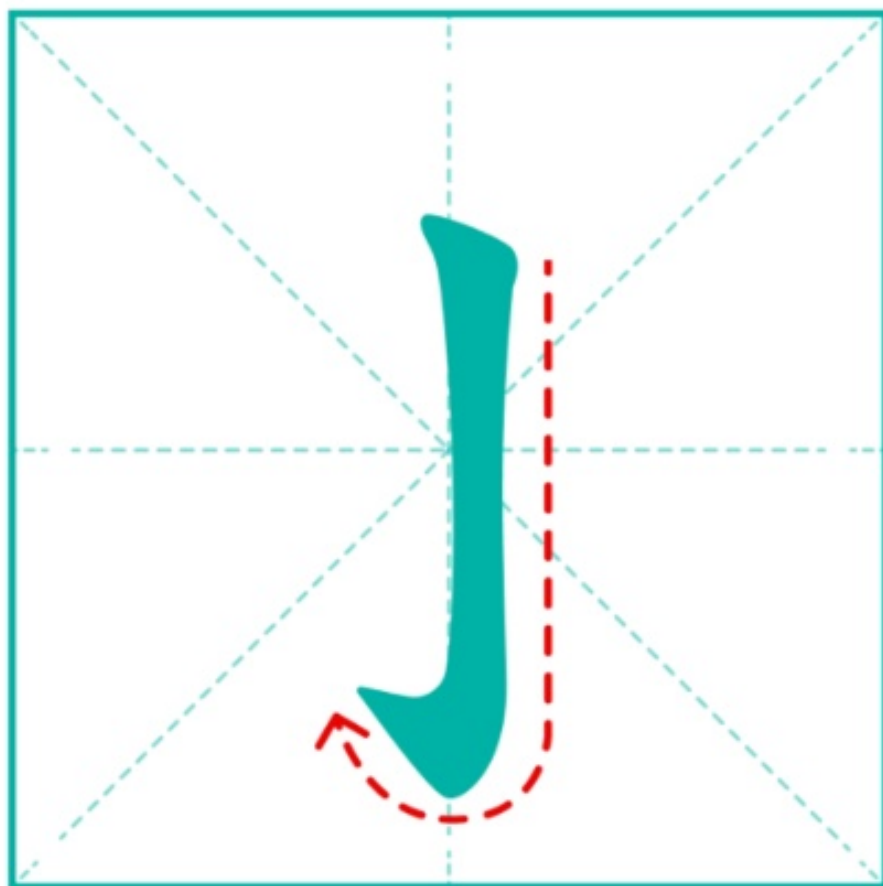
Examples:

小/ xiǎo/: small

水/ shuǐ/: water

寸/ cùn/: inch

Illustration:





## Basic Chinese characters

- \* All Chinese radicals are composed of one or more basic strokes. Therefore, before learning about radicals, we need to master the basic strokes.
- \* The basic strokes in Chinese are similar to the letters in the Vietnamese alphabet. While Vietnamese has 29 letters, Chinese has 8 basic strokes: Horizontal - Vertical - Dot - Upward Hook - Left Slant - Right Slant - Fold - Hook.



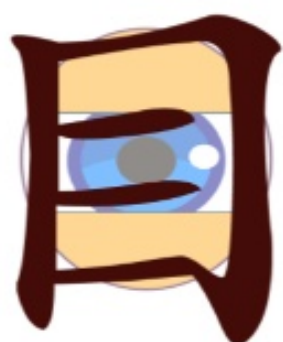
# ◀ Introduction to Chinese characters

## 2. The shape of Chinese characters

### 2.1 Pictograms

- Pictograms are the earliest form of Chinese characters, designed to resemble objects. Any object that could be drawn was depicted in the simplest way, and over time, these drawings evolved into the pictographic Chinese characters we see today. The drawings could represent the whole object or a part of it, and could be drawn from the front or from one side. Here are some examples of pictographic Chinese characters.

目 /mù/: eye



木 /mù/: tree, wood

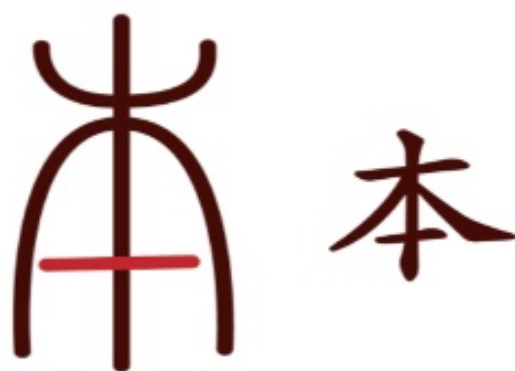


# < Introduction to Chinese characters

## 2.2 Ideograms

- Ideograms are characters that use abstract symbols or suggestive abstract symbols added to pictograms to express concepts, objects, or events that are difficult to depict. Here are some examples of ideographic Chinese characters.

本 /běn/: root, origin



寸 /cùn/: inch (unit of measurement)



中 /zhōng/: middle, center



## ◀ Introduction to Chinese characters

### 2.3 Compound Ideograms

- Compound ideograms are characters formed by combining two or more related characters. Here are some examples of compound ideograms:

明/míng/: bright

Consists of two components: 日 (sun) and 月 (moon)



从/cóng/: follow

Consists of two components: 人 (person)



林/lín/: forest

Consists of two components: 木 (tree)





## ◀ Introduction to Chinese characters

### 2.4 Phonetic Loan Characters

- Phonetic loan characters are primarily formed by combining two characters or two components, where one part represents the sound and the other part represents the meaning. The sound component is called the phonetic element, and the meaning component is called the semantic element. After their creation, **phonetic loan characters became the primary method for forming Chinese characters**. Over 90% of commonly used Chinese characters today are phonetic loan characters.

Here are some examples of phonetic loan characters:

青/qīng/: green

清/qīng/ (clear water): has 氵 as the semantic element and 青 as the phonetic element

情/qíng/ (emotion): has 忄 as the semantic element and 青 as the phonetic element

晴/qíng/ (sunny): has 日 as the semantic element and 青 as the phonetic element

请 qǐng (invite): has 讠 as the semantic element and 青 as the phonetic element



## 50 basic radicals

### I. What is a radical?

Radicals (部首) are the basic components that form Chinese characters, as a Chinese character is constructed from one or more radicals combined together. The position of the radical is not fixed but varies depending on each character, so it can be placed on top, bottom, right, left, or surrounding.

Example:

Character 天 /tiān/: sky, day

Composed of a single radical 天 /tiān/: the sky radical

Character 好 /hǎo/: good, well

Composed of two radicals: 女/nǚ/: the woman radical; 子/zǐ/: the child radical







## 50 basic radicals

### II. The benefits of radicals

#### 1. Easily look up in a dictionary to understand the meaning of Chinese characters

In Chinese character dictionaries from ancient times to the present, characters are grouped into categories based on radicals, usually according to their meaning. Among the thousands of Chinese characters, all are categorized under one of the more than 200 radicals.

Example:

妈妈 /Māmā/: mother

姐姐 /Jiějiě/: older sister

妹妹 /Mèimei/: younger sister

她 /Tā/: she

These characters all share the woman radical: 女 /nǚ/, as their meanings are related to women.

#### 2. Radicals can help infer the meaning of a Chinese character through the meaning of its radical components

In addition to classifying Chinese characters, radicals also serve as semantic indicators that, while not always exact, allow readers to infer the root meaning.

Example:

木/mù/: tree (the wood radical)





## 50 basic radicals

### III. Basic Radicals

Chinese characters consist of **214 radicals**, each with its own unique meaning.

However, according to statistics, out of approximately 3,000 commonly used Chinese characters, about 50 radicals are frequently used. Mastering these 50 radicals is extremely important, as it helps us write, look up in dictionaries, and handle tasks related to the Chinese language more easily. In the upcoming lessons, we will study these 50 commonly used radicals in Chinese.





## 50 basic radicals

Natural set - 日、月、土

### 1. The Sun Radical

Writing: 日

Used in Chinese characters related to **the sun**.



The 日 radical can be a complete word

Example:

日 /rì/: sun, day

阳 /yáng/: sunlight, sun

晴 /qíng/: clear sky, sunny

### 2. The Moon Radical

Writing: 月

Used in Chinese characters related to **the moon**.





## 4. The Fire Radical

Used in Chinese characters related to **fire**.



Example:

火 /huǒ/: fire

炒 /chǎo/: to stir-fry

灰 /huī/: ash

## 5. The Water Radical

Writing: 水 (ゐ)

Used in Chinese characters related to **water**.







## 50 basic radicals

Natural set - 山、艹、石

### 7. The Mountain Radical

Writing: 山

Used in Chinese characters related to mountains.



The 山 radical can be a complete word

Example:

山 /shān/: mountain

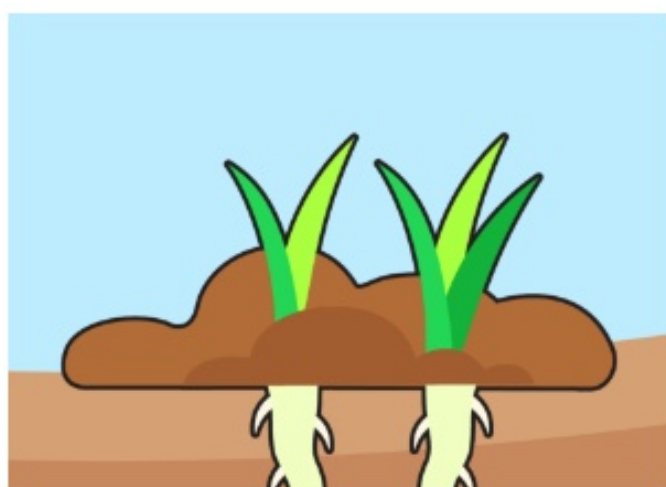
峪 /yù/: valley

峰 /fēng/: peak

### 8. The Grass Radical

Writing: 艹

Used in Chinese characters related to grass.





## 50 basic radicals

Life Radicals - 礻、人 (亻)、犬 (犳)

### 1. The Spirit Radical

Writing: 礻

Used in Chinese characters related to **spirits** or **deities**.



Example:

神 /shén/: spirit, deity

禡 /méi/: fertility rite

祀 /sì/: to sacrifice, to offer

### 2. The Human Radical

Writing: 人 (亻)

Used in Chinese characters related to **people**.





## 50 basic radicals

Life Radicals - 女、父、子

### 4. The Woman Radical

Writing: 女

Used in Chinese characters related to **women or females**.



The 女 radical can be a complete word

Example:

女 /nǚ/: woman, female

妈 /mā/: mother

妻 /qī/: wife

### 5. The Father Radical

Writing: 父

Used in Chinese characters related to **father**.







## 50 basic radicals

Life Radicals - 鸟、马、鱼

### 7. The Bird Radical

Writing: 鸟

Used in Chinese characters related to **birds**.



The 鸟 radical can be a complete word

Example:

鸟 /niǎo/: bird

鸥 /ōu/: seagull

鹅 /é/: goose

### 8. The Horse Radical

Writing: 马

Used in Chinese characters related to **horses**.





## 50 basic radicals

Human Body Radicals - 口、目、心 (忄)

### 1. The Mouth Radical

Writing: 口

Used in Chinese characters related to the mouth.



The 口 radical can be a complete word

Example:

口 /kǒu/: mouth

咬 /yǎo/: to bite, to chew

喊 /hǎn/: to shout, to call

### 2. The Eye Radical

Writing: 目

Used in Chinese characters related to the eyes.





#### 4. The Hand Radical

Used in Chinese characters related to the hand.



Example:

拿 /ná/: to hold

掌 /zhǎng/: palm (of the hand)

## 5. The Foot Radical

Used in Chinese characters related to the foot.





## 50 basic radicals

### Action Radicals - 扌、辶、力

#### 1. The Hand Radical (扌)

Writing: 扌

Used in Chinese characters related to **hand actions**.



Example:

摸 /mō/: to touch, to feel

打 /dǎ/: to hit, to beat

挖 /wā/: to dig

#### 2. The Walk Radical

Writing: 辶

Used in Chinese characters related to **walking**.





## 50 basic radicals

Action Radicals - 八, 刀 (刂), 爪

### 4. The Eight Radical

Writing: 八

Used in Chinese characters related to **separation or division**.



The 八 radical can be a complete word

Example:

分 /fēn/: to divide, to separate

份 /fèn/: portion

兵 /bīng/: soldier

### 5. The Knife Radical

Writing: 刀 (刂)

Used in Chinese characters related to **knife or sharp objects**.







## 50 basic radicals

Action Radicals - 讠, 食 (饣), 言 (讠)

### 7. The Ice Radical

Writing: 冫

Used in Chinese characters related to **ice**.



Example:

冰 /bīng/: ice

冻 /dòng/: to freeze

凛 /lǐn/: cold, frigid

### 8. The Food Radical

Writing: 食 (饣)

Used in Chinese characters related to **eating** or **food**.





Life Set - 巾、糸、襪

Writing: 巾

Used in Chinese characters related to cloth.



The 巾 radical can be a complete word

Examples:

巾 /jīn/: cloth

帕 /pà/: handkerchief

帋 /wéi/: curtain

Writing:  $\leq$

Used in Chinese characters related to **fine threads**.







#### 4. The Min Radical

Used in Chinese characters related to **dishes**.



Examples:

盘 /pán/: plate

盆 /pén/: basin

盥 /bō/: bowl

## 5. The Mi Radical

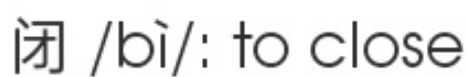
Writing: 米

Used in Chinese characters related to **rice grains**.





Used in Chinese characters related to doors.



Used in Chinese characters related to **rice** plants.





## Civilization Set - 雨, 竹 (^), 贝

Writing: 雨

Used in Chinese characters related to **rain**.



The 雨 radical can be a complete word

Examples:

雨 /yǔ/: rain

雪 /xuě/: snow

雷 /léi/: thunder

Writing: 竹 (^ ^)

Used in Chinese characters related to bamboo.





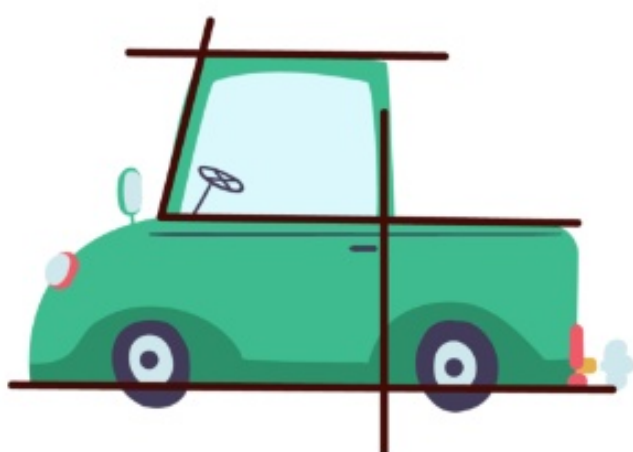
## 50 basic radicals

Civilization Set - 车、舟

### 4. The Che Radical

Writing: 车

Used in Chinese characters related to **vehicles**.



The 车 radical can be a complete word

Examples:

车 /chē/: vehicle

轮 /lún/: wheel

轨 /guǐ/: track, rail

### 5. The Zhou Radical

Writing: 舟

Used in Chinese characters related to **boats**.





## 50 basic radicals

Civilization Set - 宀、口、玉

### 6. The Mian Radical

Writing: 宀

Used in Chinese characters related to **roofs**.



Examples:

家 /jiā/: home

宿 /sù/: stay overnight

寓 /yù/: to dwell

### 7. The Wei Radical

Writing: 口

Used in Chinese characters related to **enclosure**.

