

Easy Chinese

Teach Yourself Chinese Step By Step

Mandarin

Level 1

易
学
中
文

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Frequently Asked Questions

What do you mean by “Easy Chinese?”

The term “Easy Chinese” as used in this course refers collectively to: (1) a group of Chinese characters, about 800 in number, that appear most often in modern Chinese publications and everyday correspondence; (2) the step-by-step approach in presenting these characters in the form of compound words, phrases, and sentences; (3) the system, methodology, and tools that are used in organizing these Chinese characters into a predetermined learning sequence; and (4) the basic text of this course.

How often will I see these Easy Chinese characters in a typical publication?

As an estimate, more than 80% of the characters found in modern Chinese publications come from these 800 or so characters.

For whom is your course most appropriate?

Easy Chinese is designed for anyone who wants to learn the Chinese language on his or her own step by step.

Can I use this program to supplement regular classroom instruction?

Absolutely. As a tutorial program, *Easy Chinese* can be used flexibly to supplement regular instruction.

In what fundamental ways, in terms of instructional approach, does your program differ from other programs?

First, you will learn Chinese one step at a time. Each step will be small, gradual, and manageable. You will never be overwhelmed by the amount of material you need to learn at any given time. In fact, for the first two books, each step consists of only one new character.

Second, learning is very precise. You will know exactly what to expect and what you will need to accomplish. Since the program is self-paced, you can learn at the pace that is most comfortable for you. Take as much time as you want to learn thoroughly the material provided in each step.

Third, learning is highly structured and systematic. By design, each Chinese character in the learning sequence has a special role to play in developing and expanding your

language network. Thus, you will not learn characters in isolation; you will learn them as necessary components in the formation of a network of links, connections, and associations. Typically, the more links you have in your language network, the more efficient you will become in learning the Chinese language.

Is your program designed for beginners?

The first course assumes that you have no prior background in the Chinese language and is designed for people who have never studied the Chinese language before.

Which type of characters do you teach: simplified or traditional?

Both. With just a little extra effort, you can learn both types simultaneously. Actually, most characters in the first course are the same in both simplified and traditional forms.

Are the terms “Chinese character” and “Chinese word” synonymous?

Not exactly. While a single character by itself may function as a word, a Chinese word often consists of two or more characters.

How many characters and words can I learn in the first course?

There are only 136 characters in the first course. However, the combinations of these same characters can form more than 700 compound words and phrases. Thus, the total number of words you can expect to learn in the first course is more than 800.

How many sentences are included in the first course?

From the 136 character and words that are introduced to you in the first course, you will be able to construct about 700 sentences.

In what other ways does your program differ from others in methodology and approaches?

Unlike most Chinese courses, which typically require you to learn Chinese words through rote memorization, this program provides numerous cues and prompts along the way, so that you can remember them mainly by association and deduction. You can achieve the maximum outcome with minimum effort.

Other Questions

Is Chinese very difficult to learn?

In a strict sense, no language is easy to learn. Every language requires years of study and practice, and Chinese is no exception. In some respects, it is true that Chinese is among the more difficult-to-learn languages, but in other respects, Chinese is not as difficult as many people think. Hopefully with the learning system used in *this program*, you will master the Chinese language quickly and comfortably.

Why do people believe that Chinese is difficult to learn?

The following are some major reasons why Chinese may be difficult to learn:

First, Chinese has no alphabet, and therefore has no phonetic system of pronunciation. The pronunciation of Chinese words must be memorized by rote. Second, each Chinese character contains a number of arbitrary strokes that must be memorized and practiced. Third, there are many Chinese characters to learn. Fourth, since each character is a self-contained unit and is uniformly spaced, it is difficult to know how the characters should be combined and how they relate to each other in a sentence.

Can each individual Chinese character be represented by a different sound?

The sounds of modern Chinese are limited in number. For this reason, many characters have the same sound but different tones. Thanks to pinyin, a scheme for the Chinese phonetic system, all the basic syllables in the common speech of modern Chinese can be represented by using the 26 letters of the English alphabet.

How can I remember the sounds and elements that make up all the characters?

Many Chinese characters consist of one or more basic elements known as radicals. A radical, which contains fewer strokes than the character itself, usually suggests the meaning of the character as a whole. When a radical is combined with another radical or a character, the latter often serves as a cue for the pronunciation of the character. Once you know how to write a radical and know the basic elements that make up a character, you can easily transfer your skill to the writing of other characters having the same radical or elements.

If I know the 800 or so most frequently used characters, will I be able to read modern Chinese with an adequate level of comprehension?

If you master these 800 characters and related compound words, you should be able to read and write modern Chinese with about 80 percent communicative competence. Of course, this

is only an estimate.

How can a vocabulary of only about 800 characters enable me to obtain such a level of proficiency?

This has a lot to do with the way characters can be combined to form disyllabic or trisyllabic words. One individual character may be a word in itself if it conveys a single concept or meaning. However, some characters may also be combined with another character (or sometimes even with the same character) to form a new word. Therefore, even though you have only learned about 800 characters, the actual number of words you have learned may exceed 5000 when compound words and phrases are included.[A1]

Is it true that you can substitute words in Chinese sentences more freely than those in the English language?

Nouns or pronouns can be interchanged in a Chinese sentence without regard to number or **gender**. Verbs remain unchanged whether the subject is singular or plural. Other substitutions are also possible because Chinese verbs are not conjugated.

Is it true that I must learn words by rote in the Chinese language to a far greater extent than in other languages?

Actually, the reverse is true. Because there are many visual and logical cues in the Chinese language, you can learn Chinese characters and words by taking advantage of your own abilities to visualize, to associate, and to reason.

Why is it difficult for a non-Chinese-speaking person to read Chinese?

Perhaps the most difficult problem for people who study Chinese as a second language is the **way** Chinese sentences appear on a printed page. Chinese characters are uniformly spaced without proper capitalization. It is difficult for beginners to know whether a character is related to the one before it or the one after it. It is also difficult to know which two characters join together to represent a separate word.

How can the problem of uniform spacing be overcome in learning Chinese?

One solution to this problem is to teach character combinations as soon as students have learned the appropriate characters, as we do in *Easy Chinese*. Students should also be provided with numerous examples that show how characters in a sentence can relate to each other. This can be done with the use of boxes and diagrams, again as we do in this program.

Should I learn both traditional and simplified characters at the same time?

Unless you permanently stay in one place and read the same newspapers, it may be more advantageous for you to know both traditional and simplified characters. Actually, most of the characters in this first course are the same for both versions. In Mainland China, only simplified characters are taught in school. On the other hand, in Taiwan and in Hong Kong, students are primarily taught to read and write traditional characters. In the United States, Chinese newspapers are increasingly printed in both forms. Although *Easy Chinese* places more emphasis on traditional characters, you can learn simplified characters at the same time with a little extra effort.

Explanation of Lesson Format

In general, each Chinese character is introduced in the order shown below:

1. Definition and pronunciation of the new character:

The Chinese character (in both traditional and simplified versions) is shown with its pinyin transliteration and meanings. The number indicates the sequence of characters covered in this course. For example, the number 32 below implies that you have so far studied 31 characters. The following character is numbered 32 in the order of presentation.

門 门

#32 門 mén door; gate; entrance; family 门

2. About this character:

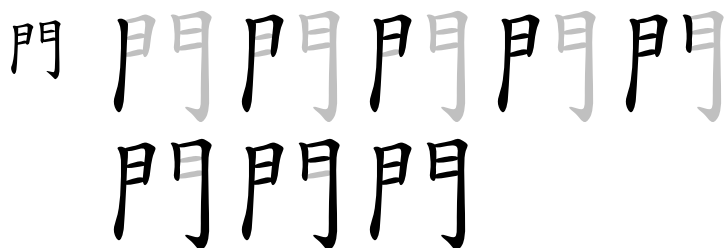
This section attempts to create some imagery as a mnemonic device for learning this character. Some pictographs or ideographs associated with this character may be shown if available. However, there is no need for you to remember their exact appearances or shapes. Do pay particular attention to the words in *italics*, as they are related to the meanings of the character in question.

門 门

The early form is a picture of two *door* leaves facing each other when the *door* is closed. The opening also represents the *entrance* of a house or building. The character “門” means more than just “*door*” or “*gate*”, it also stands for “*family*”, “*category*,” and “*key*” to success. In the Chinese culture, the *door* is a symbol for social status and *family* reputation. For example, a well-matched marriage is often described as being equal in terms of the appearances of the *doors* of the couple's families.

3. Stroke order for this character:

In this section, the typical way of writing this character is shown. Practice writing it by following the stroke order:



4. New compound words:

Learn the compound words or phrases which are formed by connecting this new character with the “old” ones you have already learned. Try to guess the meaning of each compound word before you see its definition. Often the meaning of each character involved can serve as a cue. Some examples:

門外	mén wài	outside the door	门外
大門	dà mén	main entrance; main door	大门
木門	mù mén	wooden door	木门

5. Incomplete sentences:

Fill in the blank with the missing words based on the two cues provided: their pronunciation and the corresponding meaning in English (in bold).

門外是不是 ----- ? (xià dà yǔ)
Is it **raining heavily** outside?

明天是 ----- 。 (xià yǔ tiān)
Tomorrow is a **rainy day**.

6. Illustrative sentences:

Understand the meaning of each illustrative sentence with the help of its pinyin and English translation. See below for an example of how a newly-acquired character such as “有” (to have) has altered the meaning of similar sentences shown in previous sections. The following sentences are constructed with only the first 35 characters in the program.

馬大川有子女。
Ma Dachuan has **children**.

马大川有子女。
mǎ dà chuān yǒu zǐ nǚ

門外有人。
There is someone **outside**.

门外有人。
mén wài yǒu rén

馬月明有田有地。
Ma Yueming **has fields and land**.

马月明有田有地。
mǎ yuè míng yǒu tián yǒu dì

1. Accumulative total:

At the end of each section, you are given the total number of characters, compound words, and sentences you are supposed to have learned up to this point. For example, at the end of Lesson 8, you would have been introduced to 112 characters, along with 534 compound words and 499 sentences.

