

Writing workbook



# Chinese

The basics



月 日 天 今 几 中 国 去 人 多  
云 山 水 田 画 刀 力 男 女 子  
好 你 心 您 大 小 马 吗 是 我  
不 生 有 没 孩 个 口 北  
方 南 西 东 风 点 火 系  
上 下 车 雨 雪 冷 明 白 米 饭

Your first  
100  
characters

Writing workbook



# Chinese

**The basics**



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Adapted for English speakers  
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# Introduction


## Chinese characters

- Scholarly dictionaries include more than 50,000 Chinese characters.
- Only 3000 characters are commonly used, but a learner can gradually pick up more over time.
- You can read Chinese if you know just 1000 characters.
- The first step is to learn 100 frequently used characters.
- We've included some ancient characters (at the bottom right of the grids) – written as they were in the 14th century BCE – as a memory aid.

## Each character:

- is in fact a one-syllable word that conveys a meaning.
- is written in a square shape.
- is equally spaced from the next (there are no spaces between words in Chinese).
- can be combined with other characters to form different words.

## Using this workbook

- It's most effective to learn one character a day, progressing one page at a time.
- The arrows show which direction to write each stroke.
- The panels give extra information about a character.
- The 10 steps allow you to review, practice and extend your learning.
- The  symbol indicates a keyword that you could research on the internet.

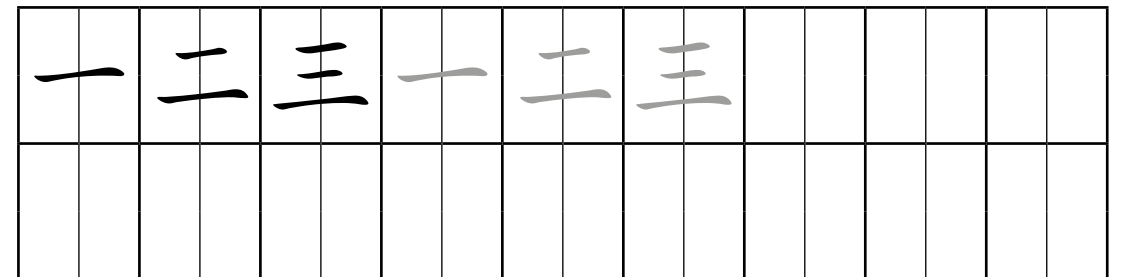
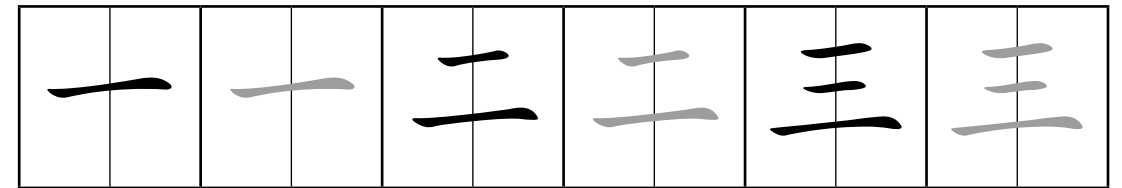
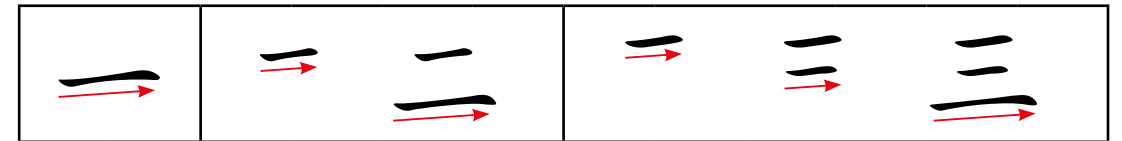
## Pronunciation

- Unlike a letter, a Chinese character gives no indication of how it is pronounced.
- This is why we have included the official phonetic transcription (pinyin) in bold.
- Pinyin is helpful for learning the pronunciation of a character, but it is not always obvious how a letter or group of letters should sound. So we have also included phonetic transcriptions using approximate English sounds in brackets [ ] to help you get used to how pinyin is pronounced.
- Chinese is a tonal language. You'll find out more about this as you work step by step through the workbook.
- In the online *MDBG Chinese Reader*, you can search for a character using pinyin, and then double-click on it to hear how it is pronounced.

## Helpful tips

- Pronounce the word as you're writing it. This will help you remember the link between the character, its sound and its meaning.
- Start by tracing the character in the air to memorize how to write the strokes.
- In the workbook, first write using a pencil, then go over the strokes with a pen.
- You can practice writing Chinese characters using a wet calligraphy brush and a slate.

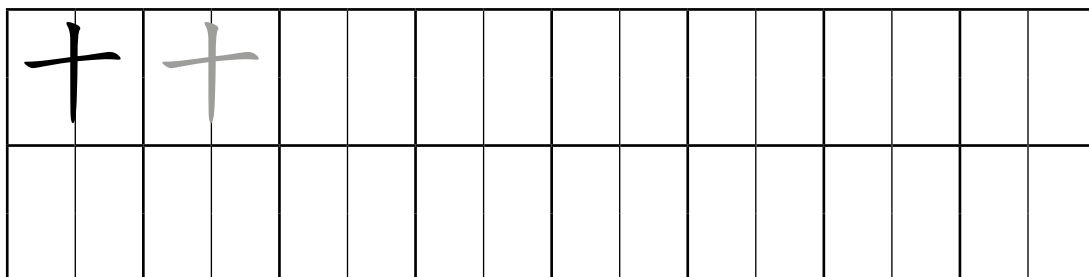
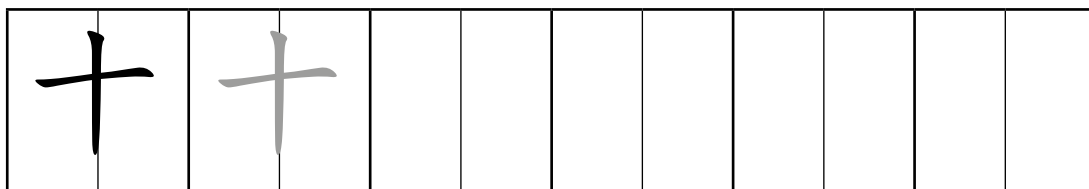
一 二 三 one, two, three



Let's start with the numbers. The first is **yī** *one*, pronounced [yee]. Follow the direction of the arrows. Write on top of the grey outlines to help you get the hang of it. In the pinyin, note the tone mark  $\bar{\quad}$  over the vowel. This indicates the 1st tone, which is high and level, like the sound of a tuning fork: 'laaa ...'. Using the same pitch, practice saying **yī**  $\bar{\quad}$   $\bar{\quad}$ ...

Next we have the number **èr** *two*. First draw the short horizontal stroke at the top, then the longer horizontal stroke underneath it. In the pinyin, the tone mark  $\backslash$  indicates that the syllable is in the 4th tone, which is short and falling  $\searrow$ . In this word, the **e** is pronounced as in *father*, and the **r** like the American 'r' at the end of a word: [ar].

Finally, we have the number **sān** *three*. This is pronounced [sahn] ([ah] as in *father*) in the 1st tone (high and level). Follow the arrows from top to bottom. The strokes are closer together than they are in **èr** as three strokes need to fit in the same space. Pay attention to the length of each stroke. Practice sounding out **yī**, **èr**, **sān** [yee, ar, sahn] to link each character with its sound.


 ten


The number *ten* is written **shí**, which is pronounced [shih]. Although the pinyin **i** is usually pronounced [ee], when it comes after **sh** it is similar to the [ih] in *ship*, but as if you stop abruptly before pronouncing the final consonant.

The tone mark / over the vowel indicates the 2nd tone, which is rising ↗. This is not unlike the rising intonation used in English to show surprise: *Oh really?* Imagine there are two notes ♪, the second of which is higher. If you voice these two notes while saying the syllable **shí** [shih], this is similar to the 2nd tone. But keep in mind that in Chinese this tone does not express surprise, it is simply part of the pronunciation of the word.

First draw the horizontal stroke from left to right, then the vertical stroke from top to bottom. The trick is making them cross in the right place. The horizontal stroke should cross the vertical stroke about one-third of the way from the top. The vertical stroke should be right in the middle of the horizontal stroke.

## Step 1

## Two writing rules and a tip

- Horizontal strokes, long or short, are always written from left to right →.
- A character is generally written from top to bottom ↓.
- Compare the length of different horizontal strokes before writing them.

## Questions

1. Write the Chinese characters and pinyin for these three numbers. 🖐️ 🖐️ 🖐️  
 → .....  
 → .....  
 → .....
2. Does China also use Arabic numerals such as 1, 2, 3, etc.?  
 → .....

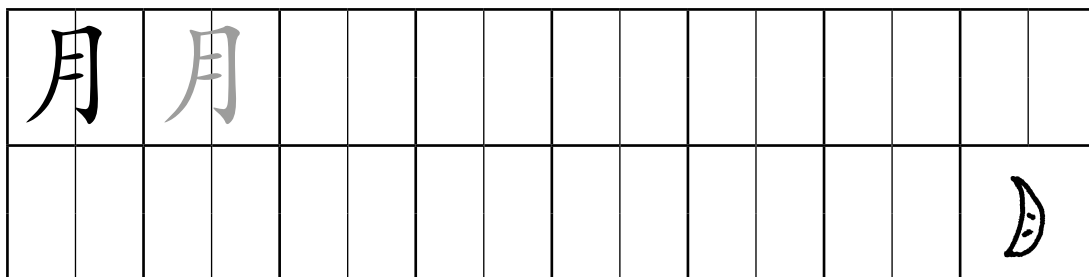
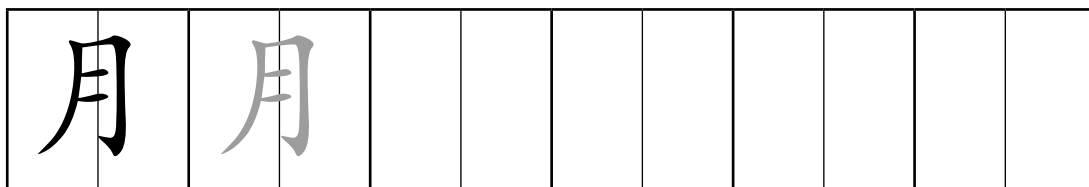
## Two writing rules and a tip

- A horizontal stroke → is written before a vertical stroke ↓ that crosses it.
- A horizontal stroke can go up slightly, but a vertical line is always completely vertical.
- Note where strokes intersect and the lengths of the stroke on either side.

## Questions

3. Which of these two crosses 十 十 represents the number 10 in Chinese?  
 → .....
4. Is the pinyin **i** pronounced in the same way in **yī** one and **shí** ten?  
 → .....
5. How is the pinyin **sh** pronounced?  
 → .....
6. In China, to show 10, would you cross your index fingers in the shape of 十 or X?  
 → .....

# 月 moon, month



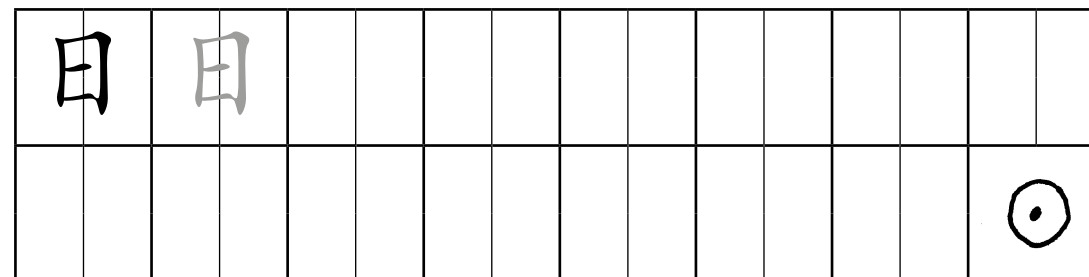
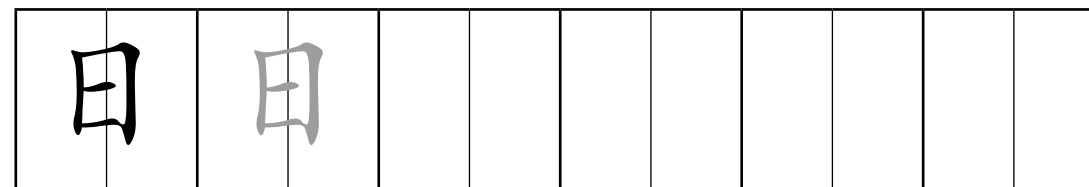
The word **yuè** *moon, month* is in the 4th tone, so it is short and falling. It sounds like [yueh], spoken rapidly so the vowels blend together.

The first stroke goes straight down, then curves towards the left. The second stroke makes a right angle, ending in a little hook that goes back up towards the two interior horizontal strokes, which are drawn last. So the outside of the character is written before the inside.

In ancient times, the pictogram looked like a crescent moon (see the bottom right of the grid above). Perhaps the two interior marks illustrated the relief of the Moon's surface? Or perhaps they represented Chang'e's 羿, the Chinese Goddess of the Moon, who lives there and misses her original home, the Earth?

In Chinese, the months are numbered: 一月 **yī yuè** *January* ('one month'); 二月 **èr yuè** *February* ('two month'); 三月 **sān yuè** *March* ('three month'); 十月 **shí yuè** [shih yueh] *October* ('ten month'), etc.

# 日 sun, day



The word **rì** *sun, day* is in the 4th tone (short and falling). It is pronounced [rih]: the Chinese **r** at the beginning of a syllable is something like the [zh] sound in *measure*. After the sound **r**, the **i** is pronounced [ih] as in **shí** [shih] *ten*.

The ancient pictogram was round (see above). It became square with the introduction of the brush. The final stroke at the bottom goes from left to right to join up with the little hook of the second stroke.

A legend recounts that there used to be ten suns that took turns crossing the sky. One morning they all came up together, scorching the crops. So the archer Yi 羿 shot down nine of them. Fortunately, he allowed one to remain!

The date is written with the month first, followed by the day (the number): 一月三日 **yī yuè sān rì** [yee yueh sahn rih] *3 January*; 三月二日 **sān yuè èr rì** [sahn yueh ar rih] *2 March*; 十月一日 **shí yuè yī rì** [shih yueh yee rih] *1 October*, National Day in the People's Republic of China.

## Step 2

### One rule and two facts

- A vertical stroke is drawn from top to bottom ↓. Sometimes it curves towards the left 丿.
- A stroke might include a 'break', or right angle 冂.
- Many strokes end in a little hook, such as 冂.

### Questions

1. Does the character 月 **yuè** [*yueh*] *moon* have 4 or 5 strokes?

→ .....

2. You already know 4 basic strokes in Chinese characters. What are they?

→ .....

3. Why are the right angle and hook of a stroke a bit thicker?

→ .....

### One rule and one note

- Any interior strokes are drawn before the bottom stroke (i.e. the base of the character).
- The inside strokes might not touch the sides.

### Questions

4. Do the characters for the 日 *sun* and the 月 *moon* have the same number of strokes?

→ .....

5. Are these characters the same size?

→ .....

6. Which strokes are different in these two characters?

→ .....

7. The pinyin **i** is sometimes pronounced [*ee*] and sometimes [*ih*]. True or false?

→ .....

① 4 strokes ② — horizontal, | vertical, 丿 downstroke to the left, 冂 right angle with a hook ③ Because the calligraphy brush changes direction without leaving the paper. With a pencil or pen, the character is also drawn continuously, but the thickness of the line doesn't change. ④ Yes, 4 strokes ⑤ The character for *sun* is a bit smaller when written by hand. ⑥ The first and the last ⑦ True.