

DESCRIBING CHARACTERS

--WITHOUT A PEN AND PAPER!--

Speakers of the Chinese language sometimes find they need to explain what word they are saying, but they do not have a place to write it down. This is similar to English speakers: when we say a homonym, such as *except vs accept*, *assistants vs assistance*, *ensure vs insure*, etc.

Here are some strategies Chinese people use to describe characters without pen and paper:

1. Explaining what radicals each character contains.
 - a. Example: My name has a pretty uncommon character in it: 佳。 Sometimes I explain this character by saying, “左边有人， 右边有两个土” “It has a person radical on the left side, and the right side has two earth radicals.” I would often say it while drawing it in the air to reinforce the image.
2. Explaining which character it is by giving examples of other words that use the same character.
 - a. Example: If you want to explain the character “中” you might give the example, “中国的中” which literally means , “China’ s Zhong” (the zhong that is in the word for China.)
3. Writing the character out on their palm with their finger.
4. Describing the actual individual strokes and their Chinese names. (We’ll talk about this another day!)

Today, we are going to practice the first strategy. This strategy works well for characters that are completely composed of clear radicals.

Some direction words to help you do this:

上边	/	上面	下面	右边	左边	中间
shàngbian		shàngmian	xiàmian	yòubiān	zuǒbiān	zhōngjiān
top		top	bottom	right	left	middle

Here is the pattern:

[side]	+	[有]	+	[name of radical]
“On this side,”		“there is a”		“name of radical”

Practice the pattern by describing these words using the radicals you have already learned:

1. 姓
2. 们
3. 间 (jian1 room)
4. 信 (xin4 a letter)

Order by: Radical Number Stroke Count Pinyin English					
Radical No.	Radical	English	Pinyin	Stroke Count	Variant
1	一	one	yī	1	
2	丨	line	shù	1	
3	丶	dot	diǎn	1	
4	丿	slash	piě	1	㇀ ㇁
5	乙	second	yǐ	1	㇂ ㇃
6	亅	hook	gōu	1	
7	二	two	èr	2	
8	冫	lid	tóu	2	
9	人	person	rén	2	亻
10	儿	legs	ér	2	
11	入	enter	rù	2	
12	八	eight	bā	2	丷
13	冂	down box	jiǒng	2	
14	宀	cover	mì	2	
15	冫	ice	bīng	2	
16	几	table	jī	2	
17	凵	open box	qǔ	2	
18	刀	knife	dāo	2	刂
19	力	power	lì	2	
20	勹	wrap	bāo	2	
21	匕	ladle	bǐ	2	
22	匚	right open box	fāng	2	
23	匚	hiding enclosure	xǐ	2	
24	十	ten	shí	2	
25	卜	divination	bǔ	2	
26	卩	seal	jié	2	
27	厂	cliff	hàn	2	

28	厶	private	sī	2	
29	又	again	yòu	2	
30	口	mouth	kǒu	3	
31	囗	enclosure	wéi	3	
32	土	earth	tǔ	3	
33	士	scholar	shì	3	
34	夕	go	suī	3	
35	夕	go slowly	zhī	3	
36	夕	night	xī	3	
37	大	big	dà	3	
38	女	woman	nǚ	3	
39	子	child	zǐ	3	
40	宀	roof	gài	3	
41	寸	inch	cùn	3	
42	小	small	xiǎo	3	
43	尢	lame	yóu	3	尢
44	尸	corpse	shī	3	
45	屮	sprout	chè	3	
46	山	mountain	shān	3	
47	川	river	chuān	3	川 川
48	工	work	gōng	3	
49	己	oneself	jǐ	3	
50	巾	towel	jīn	3	
51	干	dry	gān	3	
52	幺	thread	yāo	3	
53	宀	shelter	guǎng	3	
54	彳	stride	yǐn	3	
55	廾	hands joined	gǒng	3	
56	弋	shoot with a bow	yì	3	
57	弓	bow	gōng	3	

58	𠃉	snout	jì	3	彐
59	彡	hair	shān	3	
60	彳	step	chì	3	
61	心	heart	xīn	4	卩
62	戈	spear	gē	4	
63	户	door	hù	4	
64	手	hand	shǒu	4	扌
65	支	branch	zhī	4	
66	攴	rap	pū	4	攴
67	文	script	wén	4	
68	斗	dipper	dǒu	4	
69	斤	axe	jīn	4	
70	方	square	fāng	4	
71	无	not	wú	4	
72	日	sun	rì	4	
73	曰	say	yuē	4	
74	月	moon	yuè	4	
75	木	tree	mù	4	
76	欠	lack	qiàn	4	
77	止	stop	zhǐ	4	
78	殳	death	dǎi	4	
79	殳	weapon	shū	4	
80	毋	mother	mǔ	4	
81	比	compare	bǐ	4	
82	毛	fur	máo	4	
83	氏	clan	shì	4	
84	气	steam	qì	4	
85	水	water	shuǐ	4	氵
86	火	fire	huǒ	4	灬
87	爪	claw	zhǎo	4	㇇

88	父	father	fù	4	
89	爻	lines on a trigram	yáo	4	
90	片	half of a tree trunk	qiáng	4	
91	片	slice	piàn	4	
92	牙	fang	yá	4	
93	牛	cow	niú	4	牛
94	豸	dog	quǎn	3	犬
95	玄	profound	xuán	5	
96	玉	jade	yù	5	王
97	瓜	melon	guā	5	
98	瓦	tile	wǎ	5	
99	甘	sweet	gān	5	
100	生	life	shēng	5	
101	用	use	yòng	5	
102	田	field	tián	5	
103	疋	cloth	pǐ	5	
104	疒	ill	bìng	5	
105	𠂔	foot steps	bō	5	
106	白	white	bái	5	
107	皮	skin	pí	5	
108	皿	dish	mǐn	5	
109	目	eye	mù	5	
110	矛	spear	máo	5	
111	矢	arrow	shǐ	5	
112	石	stone	shí	5	
113	示	spirit	shì	5	示
114	肉	track	róu	4	
115	禾	grain	hé	5	
116	穴	cave	xué	5	

117	立	stand	lì	5	
118	竹	bamboo	zhú	6	
119	米	rice	mǐ	6	
120	丝	silk	sī	3	
121	缶	jar	fǒu	6	
122	网	net	wǎng	6	罟
123	羊	sheep	yáng	6	
124	羽	feather	yǔ	6	
125	老	old	lǎo	6	
126	而	and	ér	6	
127	耒	plow	lěi	6	
128	耳	ear	ěr	6	
129	聿	brush	yù	6	
130	肉	meat	ròu	6	
131	臣	minister	chén	6	
132	自	oneself	zì	6	
133	至	arrive	zhì	6	
134	臼	mortar	jiù	6	
135	舌	tongue	shé	6	
136	舛	contrary	chuǎn	6	
137	舟	boat	zhōu	6	
138	艮	mountain	gèn	6	
139	色	color	sè	6	
140	艸	grass	cǎo	3	
141	虍	tiger	hǔ	6	
142	虫	insect	chóng	6	
143	血	blood	xuě	6	
144	行	walk	xíng	6	
145	衣	clothes	yī	6	衤
146	西	west	xī	6	西

147	见	see	jiàn	4	
148	角	horn	jiǎo	7	
149	讠	speech	yán	2	
150	谷	valley	gǔ	7	
151	豆	bean	dòu	7	
152	豕	pig	shǐ	7	
153	豸	badger	zhì	7	
154	贝	shell	bèi	4	
155	赤	red	chì	7	
156	走	walk	zǒu	7	
157	足	foot	zú	7	
158	身	body	shēn	7	
159	车	cart	chē	4	
160	辛	bitter	xīn	7	
161	辰	morning	chén	7	
162	辶	walk	chuò	3	
163	邑	city	yì	7	β
164	酉	wine	yǒu	7	
165	采	distinguish	biàn	7	
166	里	village	lǐ	7	
167	钅	metal	jīn	5	金
168	长	long	cháng	4	
169	门	gate	mén	3	
170	阜	mound	fù	8	β
171	隶	slave	lì	8	
172	隹	short-tailed bird	zhuī	8	
173	雨	rain	yǔ	8	
174	青	blue	qīng	8	
175	非	wrong	fēi	8	
176	面	face	miàn	9	

177	革	leather	gé	9	
178	韦	soft leather	wěi	4	
179	韭	leek	jiǔ	9	
180	音	sound	yīn	9	
181	页	page	yè	6	
182	风	wind	fēng	4	
183	飞	fly	fēi	4	
184	食	eat	shí	3	食 食
185	首	head	shǒu	9	
186	香	fragrant	xiāng	9	
187	马	horse	mǎ	3	
188	骨	bone	gǔ	9	
189	高	high	gāo	10	
190	髟	long hair	biāo	10	
191	鬥	fight	dòu	10	
192	鬯	sacrificial wine	chàng	10	
193	鬲	cauldron	lì	10	
194	鬼	ghost	guǐ	9	
195	鱼	fish	yú	8	
196	鸟	bird	niǎo	5	
197	卤	salty	lǔ	7	
198	鹿	deer	lù	11	
199	麦	wheat	mài	7	
200	麻	hemp	má	11	
201	黄	yellow	huáng	11	
202	黍	millet	shǔ	12	
203	黑	black	hēi	12	
204	黼	embroidery	zhǐ	12	
205	黾	frog	mǐn	8	
206	鼎	tripod	dǐng	12	

207	鼓	drum	gǔ	13	
208	鼠	rat	shǔ	13	
209	鼻	nose	bí	14	
210	齐	even	qí	6	
211	齿	tooth	chǐ	8	
212	龙	dragon	lóng	5	
213	龟	turtle	guī	7	
214	龠	flute	yuè	17	