



CHARACTERS • DEVELOPING BEGINNER

Look-Alike Chinese Characters: Spot the Difference

Train visual discrimination with high-utility character pairs and families, then anchor each form in pronunciation, meaning, and a useful word or sentence.

rén / rù

人 / 入

person / enter

Opening direction

By the end, you can...

- ✓ Name the exact stroke or component that distinguishes a pair
- ✓ Connect each character to a word rather than a shape alone
- ✓ Create a retrieval cue for a personally confusing set



Developing beginner

35-55 minutes

19 pages

Answer guide

Self-contained print practice. Audio and web tools are optional.



1

The four-step contrast method

After this page, you can Look precisely before you name or write the character.

✓ NOTICE

Notice -> name -> anchor -> retrieve

1

Notice: circle the exact stroke or component that differs.

☐

2

Name: say the character and tone-marked pinyin.

☐

3

Anchor: read one useful word containing it.

☐

4

Retrieve: cover the model and choose it in a new sentence.

☐



2

The four-step contrast method CONTINUED

After this page, you can Look precisely before you name or write the character.

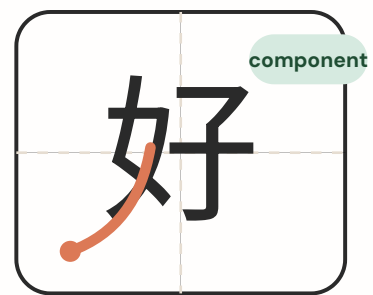
NOTICE

Example: 人 and 入

人 rén 'person' opens more broadly below; 入 rù 'enter' has a different meeting and crossing shape. Anchor them in 人们 rénmen 'people' and 入口 rùkǒu 'entrance' instead of relying on the English gloss alone.

Put it in your own words.

Cover this card and explain the idea in one sentence.



A visual anchor for this page's idea



3

One stroke changes the character

After this page, you can Compare five compact pairs and attach a useful word to each.

COMPARE

Pairs 1-5

rén

opens below

人

person

rénmen

人们

people

rù

different crossing

入

enter

rùkǒu

入口

entrance

wèi

upper stroke shorter

未

not yet; future

wèilái

未来

future

mò

upper stroke longer

末

end

zhōumò

周末

weekend

tǔ

lower stroke longer

土

earth

tǔdòu

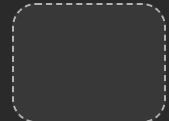
土豆

potato



Close the page. Retrieve two.

Write or say two characters from this family, then add one useful word for each.





4

One stroke changes the character

CONTINUED

After this page, you can Compare five compact pairs and attach a useful word to each.

COMPARE

Pairs 1-5

shì

士

person with training/status

upper stroke longer

nǚshì

女士

Ms.; lady

niú

牛

cow

vertical rises through top

niúǎi

牛奶

milk

wǔ

午

noon

top differs from 牛

shàngwǔ

上午

morning

wáng

王

king; surname Wang

no dot

Wáng lǎoshī

王老师

Teacher Wang

yù

玉

jade

dot at lower right

yùmǐ

玉米

corn



Close the page. Retrieve two.

Write or say two characters from this family, then add one useful word for each.





5

Length, dot, and inside stroke

After this page, you can Compare five more sets by one precise cue.

COMPARE

Pairs and trios 6-10

rì

wider box

日

day; sun

shēngrì

生日

birthday

mù

taller box, two inner lines

目

eye; item

mùqián

目前

at present

mù

plain tree form

木

wood; tree

mùtóu

木头

wood

běn

short line at base

本

root; classifier for books

yì běn shū

一本书

one book

jǐ

left side open

己

self

zìjǐ

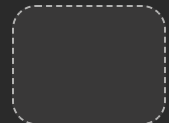
自己

oneself



Close the page. Retrieve two.

Write or say two characters from this family, then add one useful word for each.





6

Length, dot, and inside stroke CONTINUED

After this page, you can Compare five more sets by one precise cue.

COMPARE

Pairs and trios 6-10

yǐ

已

already

vertical rises higher

yǐjīng

已经

already

dà

大

big

no dot

dàxué

大学

university

tài

太

too; very

dot below

tài guì

太贵

too expensive

bái

白

white

top stroke/shape

báisè

白色

white color

bǎi

百

hundred

一 above 白

yìbǎi

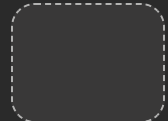
一百

one hundred



Close the page. Retrieve two.

Write or say two characters from this family, then add one useful word for each.





7

The left component changes the word

After this page, you can Use semantic components to separate two common families.

SORT

马 and 青 families

mǎ

base form

马

horse

mǎshàng

马上

right away

mā

女 woman

妈

mother

māma

妈妈

mom

ma

口 mouth

吗

yes-no question particle

hǎo ma

好吗

okay?

qǐng

讠 speech

请

please; invite

qǐngwèn

请问

excuse me; may I ask



Close the page. Retrieve two.

Write or say two characters from this family, then add one useful word for each.





8

The left component changes the word

CONTINUED

After this page, you can Use semantic components to separate two common families.

 SORT

马 and 青 families

qīng

 water

清

clear; clean

qīngchū

清楚

clear

qíng

 heart

情

feeling; situation

xīnqíng

心情

mood

qíng

 sun

晴

clear weather

qíngtiān

晴天

sunny day

**Close the page. Retrieve two.**

Write or say two characters from this family, then add one useful word for each.





9

The left component changes the word

CONTINUED

After this page, you can Use semantic components to separate two common families.

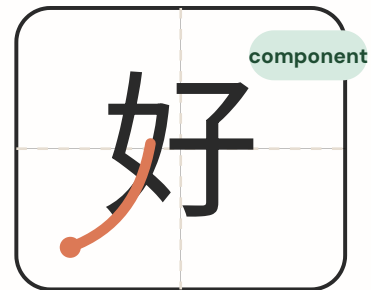
 SORT

A component is a clue, not a guarantee

The left component can suggest a broad meaning area, while the shared right side can sometimes suggest sound. Treat both as memory support; pronunciation and meaning still need to be learned in real words.

Put it in your own words.

Cover this card and explain the idea in one sentence.



A visual anchor for this page's idea



10

Choose by context

After this page, you can Retrieve the right form inside a useful word or sentence.

🔍 CHOOSE

Circle the character

Choose the character that completes the meaning.

1

WORKED EXAMPLE

周___ (weekend)

☐ 未☒ 末

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

2

___□ (entrance)

☐ 人☐ 入

3

___奶 (milk)

☐ 牛☐ 午**One more from you**

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



11

Choose by context

CONTINUED

After this page, you can Retrieve the right form inside a useful word or sentence.

 CHOOSE

Circle the character

Choose the character that completes the meaning.

4

____经 (already)

☐ 己☐ 已

5

一____书 (one book)

☐ 木☐ 本

6

____色 (white)

☐ 白☐ 百

One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



12

Use the component family

After this page, you can Choose the left component from meaning and check the whole word.

🔍 **COMPLETE**

Complete the family

Choose 请, 清, 情, or 晴.

7

WORKED EXAMPLE

___问: excuse me; may I ask

One answer qǐng

请

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

8

___楚: clear

9

心___: mood

10

___天: sunny day

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



13

Use the component family CONTINUED

After this page, you can Choose the left component from meaning and check the whole word.

COMPLETE

Complete the 马 family

Choose 马, 妈, or 吗.

11

WORKED EXAMPLE

这是你___妈吗? (Is this your mom?)

☐ 马

☒ 妈

☐ 吗

Why it works: It completes the requested job using the target pattern.

12

可以___? (Is it okay?)

☐ 马

☐ 妈

☐ 吗


One more from you

Make a new response with the same target pattern.

Finish from memory. Choose one completed response, cover the page, and make it again.



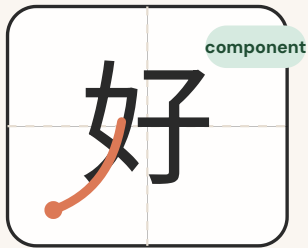
14

Build one personal confusion card

After this page, you can Review only the forms that still compete in your memory.

 **CREATE**

My contrast card



Use the visual cue, then find the matching row.

Character	Exact visible cue	Useful word	Fresh sentence



Find, cover, recall

Find one useful row. Cover it and reconstruct the target form before checking.



15

Build one personal confusion card CONTINUED

After this page, you can Review only the forms that still compete in your memory.

 **CREATE**

Cold retrieval

13

Close the workbook. Write both characters, pinyin, and one word from memory. Reopen, correct in a different color, and schedule one later retry.

Success looks like Records the exact cue and a meaningful word for both forms.

Choose your mode Write in Hanzi · write in tone-marked pinyin · say and record it



16

Check your work

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

1

周___ (weekend)

mò

末

2

___□ (entrance)

rù

入

3

___奶 (milk)

niú

牛

Why: The full word is 牛奶; the contrast cue is 牛 versus 午 in the first character.

4

___经 (already)

yǐ

已

5

一___书 (one book)

běn

本

6

___色 (white)

bái

白

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.



17

Check your work CONTINUED

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

7

___问: excuse me; may I ask

qǐng

请

8

___楚: clear

qīng

清

9

心___: mood

qíng

情

10

___天: sunny day

qíng

晴

11

这是你___妈吗? (Is this your mom?)

mā

妈

12

可以___? (Is it okay?)

ma

吗

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.



18

Check your work CONTINUED

After this page, you can compare your response, understand the repair, and choose one item to replay later.

✓ ANSWER GUIDE

Answers with useful feedback

Closed tasks have a direct answer. Open tasks include a model or success criteria; your response does not need to match word for word.

13

Close the workbook. Write both characters, pinyin, and one word from memory. Reopen, correct in a different color, and schedule one later retry.

ONE POSSIBLE ANSWER

rén — rénmen; rù — rùkǒu. Visual-cue characters: rén versus rù.

人 rén — 人们 rénmen; 入 rù — 入口 rùkǒu. Cue in this workbook font: 人's right-falling stroke begins lower; 入's two strokes meet higher. Retry: Friday.

Success criteria: Records the exact cue and a meaningful word for both forms.

Second attempt

Cover the model. Recreate it from memory, change one useful detail, and note the repair you want to revisit.

Do not stop at checking. Circle one repair and make that response again with the answer covered.