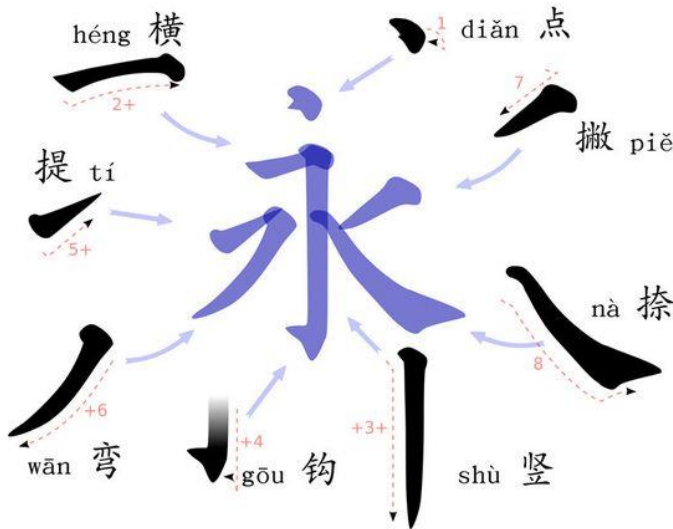


Learning Chinese Calligraphy:

Helpful resources (you can find these also by searching the internet!)



This is the character for the word that means “air” or “breath.” It’s pronounced “chee” (pinyin=“qi”) and it represents the spirit that flows through you. This is the same “chee” that is used in Tao Qi, Qi Gong, or even the word for weather (tian qi, meaning “sky air.”) In Chinese calligraphy, it’s the little imperfections that can make it possible for anyone to learn the art and enjoy it, even with a felt tip pen! The importance of the art of Chinese calligraphy is to learn the stroke orders of the different strokes in a character, and to breathe properly so that the “qi flows through you” and you can see the spirit in any Chinese character you write!



Chinese words do not have letters. The entire word is made up of strokes that are usually written in a sequence, a stroke order, that makes it easiest for a writer to write that word. (We use stroke order to write letters in English, too! Imagine writing the letter, “H” by writing the horizontal line in the middle first! That would be tiresome! We always start from the left to the right when we write that letter. Similarly, Chinese characters are written from left to right, and from up to down. Here is a character that includes all of the major strokes used for most Chinese words. This is the character for “ice.” Do you see that dot

at the top? If you took out that dot, it would mean “water.” Many Chinese characters, or words, are written in two parts...a left part and a right part, or a top part and a bottom part. The same strokes are usually written to write all Chinese characters, but we look for symmetry when we write in Chinese. You will also notice that some strokes kind of have a swipe at the end, while other strokes don’t. Other strokes have a hook or it almost looks as if they are hiding the swipe-like look. Those are some of the rules of writing in Chinese. I show some examples in the video, but you can see many examples just by looking at Chinese calligraphy artwork online!

Basic Rules of Chinese Stroke Order

1. Left to right, top to bottom.

三 川

2. Horizontal before vertical.

十

3. Cutting strokes last.

必

4. Diagonals right to left before diagonals left to right.

文

5. Center verticals before outside components.

水 小

6. Outside before inside.

回 日 月

7. Left vertical before closing.

口

8. Bottom endorsing strokes last.

這 道

9. Top or upper-left dots first.

為

10. Inside or upper-right dots last.

戈

chinesephrasebook.tumblr.com

Here's an example of someone teaching the stroke order for Chinese characters online. You can search "Chinese calligraphy stroke order" and find lots of resources like this. Sometimes they tell you the names of the strokes. You don't have to know the names of the strokes to learn Chinese calligraphy. You only have to learn these basic rules about what strokes to write first and what to write last. You can learn a lot just with a felt tip pen, and lots and lots of practice. Call us at the library if you want help finding a good teacher!



Try not to be overwhelmed when you see different variations of Chinese calligraphy online. There are different scripts, for example. But you need only focus on the standard script when getting started. So, if you see something that looks like it's chiseled, stamped, or squiggled, look for another example! Here's an example of something else you'll see when getting to know Chinese calligraphy. Many Chinese characters evolved from an image of that word thousands of years ago. This image includes the examples I show in my video, for the sun and the moon.

If you want to practice writing the sun, the moon, and the word for "bright," as I demonstrated in the video, you can visit a youtube video that shows you the stroke order for "bright" at https://youtu.be/k_9RTPTJWvI and you can also go to <http://www.thechineseclassroom.com/interesting-chinese-characters-bai-white-yue-moon-min%C9%A1-bright/> to see a few gif images that show the stroke order for each character.

Once you get started, remember that there are some pretty cool things you can buy to continue practicing Chinese calligraphy. My recommendation is to get used to using a felt tip pen first, just to make sure you enjoy the process. Next, start using newsprint or print paper in a grid of squares so that you can practice centering the character. If you are finally ready to go out and get supplies, here's a list of some of the basics. Just remember, the best investment is really to hire a tutor or teacher to coach you with this!

1. PAPERS. There are different types of papers that can be used, depending on your goal. If the paper seems expensive, don't get it unless you are ready to write a perfect character that you want to mount on a wall or give to a friend. Red is an excellent color for paper if you want to give a friend a card for "double happiness" or "good fortune" also. Some papers are absorbent like newsprint and have a grid printed on them already! But I like to just fold my newsprint into squares for practice and save my money to buy things like canvas material sold at art supply stores for brush paintings that would go on a wall. You'll find all of these materials at an art supply store or by Chinese or Japanese sellers online. Just remember, no matter what paper you use (you can even use old newspaper for your practice!), make sure to place the paper on top of a piece of felt or other cloth...something that can absorb the excess water and ink that will seep under the page.
2. BRUSHES AND PENS. Be careful about the types of brushes you purchase. If you are learning Chinese calligraphy for the first time, look for medium brushes, if you are ready to stop practicing with a felt tip pen or marker. You can find wonderful inkpens that have a brush tip,

but remember that many of them are designed for different purposes. I find that many inkpens with brush tips are too stiff for the delicacy of Chinese calligraphy, though I do like the Copic brand brush inkpen that you see in the video. The only problem is that the brush or pen you choose will limit you to a size of a Chinese character. If you get a really big brush, you can only write characters in proportion to the size of the brush. That's why I always encourage first-timers to start with medium sizes, or a marker that has a soft absorbent tip.

3. **INK.** There are many things you can purchase to practice Chinese calligraphy, depending on your goal. Traditional practices would require that you make your own ink. That means you would buy a solid ink stick and a heavy stone piece with a slope on it for making the ink. Alternately, many calligraphers purchase liquid ink. You can even dilute it with water as you are first getting started, and the diluted ink helps you see your work even better in terms of how well you are doing the brush strokes. You will always need water, of course, for the brushes. And I like to acquire a cloth, to be kept to the side of what I'm doing, where I can blot my brush if I soak it too much in ink or water. (It's fun to use the same cloth all the time, because it reminds you of all the practice you have already achieved as you learn more and more.)
4. **A SCHOLAR'S STUDIO.**

The bamboo rolls you see in the picture here are not just for decoration! They protect brushes while allowing them to dry if you are travelling from a classroom to home after practicing your calligraphy away from home. Of course, the brushes should be cleaned regularly after each session and hung to dry, vertically, to allow the shape of the brush to maintain its integrity. The other important items



you see in this picture are only for inspiration. All artists like having items around them for inspiration when working at their artwork, and calligraphers are the same. Historically, Chinese scholars would assemble important items for their studio to remind them of the tradition of Chinese culture. Many of those items would represent a genuine interest in honoring our elders. Scholars would sometimes collect rocks, for example, that were twisted and shaped in such a way to look almost like an old man! Art collectors around the world, to this day, seek the "scholar's rocks" of medieval China. You, too, can surround yourself with things to inspire you. Shown in this picture is a piece of charred wood I found on a beach, a chestnut from my daughter, and the items mentioned above for my personal use. I even have an old-fashioned stamp, a gift from my family, though I often like to use it as a paperweight when there is a breeze in my studio!

Hopefully, the notes above will give you some confidence to dive in and learn Chinese calligraphy. If I haven't said it before, you need not learn Chinese or speak Chinese to enjoy this form of art. Chinese characters are appreciated throughout the Asian world. You will find people in any bookstore in Asia able to understand a healthy range of Chinese characters, just as we learn various Latin words that we add to our vocabulary in English. The following character is something you can print and copy and write over, for practice, if you would like to write a really fancy character. It is pronounced "foo" (pinyin = fu) and means good fortune. It is also one of the most famous Chinese words in the world. It is used for Chinese New Year, for example, to wish each other good fortune in a new year. In fact, you might even see it hanging upside down! That's because the word for "upside down" in Chinese is synonymous with "to arrive." When you hang the calligraphy for good fortune upside down, it's as if you are saying that your good fortune is already arriving! I highly encourage you to seek a teacher and get some coaching in person, not just online. You can always ask us at the library to help you find a tutor. However, I understand that sometimes our enthusiasm is overwhelming and we enjoy trying to do something more advanced before we are ready, so go ahead and see if you can practice writing over this popular Chinese character. It is a popular method, actually, to help understand the symmetry of the strokes.



In case you are curious, the left side of this character has to do with sartorial things, like a wardrobe or a uniform. The right side of the character reminds one of a pagoda. The combination of having a uniform and a pagoda mean having a really good job! A Chinese scholar would sit in a studio in a pagoda, for example, and write beautiful poems in Chinese for the emperor as part of his career. In short, having clothes and shelter are indeed a sign of good fortune!

As I mentioned in the video, I highly recommend *Chinese Calligraphy: From Pictography to Ideogram* by Edoardo Fazzioli, if you'd like to learn Chinese calligraphy while also understanding the origin of various words and their uses. I also highly recommend *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols* by Wolfram Eberhard if you'd like to look at popular Chinese characters used in art throughout the ages. The writer often explains how words can be lucky or unlucky, the history of various characters, and things like the Chinese Zodiac and popular religious and cultural customs.