THE CHINA HELPER

FREE STUDENT RESOURCE

SIX YOU WILL MEET ON YOUR FIRST DAY

人	学	吃	车	买	网
rén	*xué*	*chī*	*chē*	*mǎi*	*wǎng*
person	**study**	**eat**	**vehicle**	**buy**	**internet**

Chinese Characters Starter Pack

86 characters an international student actually meets - on campus, in the canteen, on the metro and inside the apps. Each one with its pinyin, its meaning, the words it builds and the sign you will find it on.

The China Helper

SET 01
Everyday basics

SET 02
Campus

SET 03
Transport

SET 04
Food

SET 05
Shopping & payment

SET 06
Digital life

SET 07
Signs

START HERE

How Chinese characters work

Chinese has no alphabet. Each character is one syllable carrying one piece of meaning, and characters combine into words: 学 xué (study) plus 生 shēng (student / life) gives 学生 xuéshēng - student. Learn the pieces and the words start to explain themselves.

亻

The person radical. 人 rén (person) becomes 亻 on the left: 你 nǐ (you), 休 xiū (rest).

氵

Three drops of water. Characters with it are about liquid: 河 hé (river), 海 hǎi (sea).

口

The mouth radical - eating, speaking, openings: 吃 chī (eat), 叫 jiào (to call).

女

The woman radical: 好 hǎo (good) is a woman 女 with a child 子 beside her.

EVERY CARD IN THIS PACK

What each entry tells you

- [ ] **The character** - the unit you will recognise on a sign
- [ ] **Pinyin** - how to say it, with the tone mark
- [ ] **Meaning** - the core idea in English
- [ ] **Words** - real words built from this character
- [ ] **Seen** - where in China you will meet it
- [ ] **Tone marks** - - the shape of your voice

Tone marks: mā flat and high · má rising · mǎ dipping · mà falling. Same syllable, different mark, different word - 妈 mā is "mother" and 马 mǎ is "horse".

HOW TO STUDY THEM

Four rules that beat cramming

- [ ] Recognition beats handwriting - you need to read signs, not win a calligraphy prize.
- [ ] When a new character appears, look for a radical you know and guess the field it belongs to.
- [ ] Review ten characters every few days. Cramming 80 once teaches you nothing by Friday.
- [ ] Photograph signs you cannot read and look them up that evening - context makes them stick.

学 xué - study, everywhere

- [ ] **学生 xuéshēng** - *student*
- [ ] **大学 dàxué** - *university*
- [ ] **学习 xuéxí** - *to study*

车 chē - vehicle, on every street

- [ ] **火车 huǒchē** - *train*
- [ ] **公交车 gōngjiāochē** - *bus*
- [ ] **车站 chēzhàn** - *station*

One character, many words. Knowing 学 and 车 is worth six words - this is why recognition beats memorising whole phrases. Every card in this pack works the same way.

SET 1 · BASIC EVERYDAY CHARACTERS

Basic Everyday

人 *rén*
Person / People
Words 外国人 wàiguórén (foreigner) · 学生 xuéshēng
Seen ID documents, introduction forms, public

大 *dà*
Big / Large
Words 大学 dàxué (university) · 大楼 dàlóu (large
Seen University gate, building names, store signs

小 *xiǎo*
Small / Little
Words 小店 xiǎodiàn (small shop) · 小学 xiǎoxué
Seen Local convenience stores, street shop signs

中 *zhōng*
Middle / China
Words 中国 Zhōngguó (China) · 中文 Zhōngwén
Seen Official signs, packaging, campus notice

国 *guó*
Country / Nation
Words 国家 guójiā (country) · 国际 guójì
Seen Passport-related documents,

文 *wén*
Language / Writing / Culture
Words 中文 Zhōngwén (Chinese language) · 文字
Seen Library, textbook, language class notice

学 *xué*
Study / Learn
Words 学生 xuéshēng (student) · 学校 xuéxiào
Seen Campus everywhere, classroom door,

生 *shēng*
Life / Raw / Student
Words 学生 xuéshēng (student) · 先生 xiānsheng
Seen Student ID, campus registration paper

日 *rì*
Sun / Day / Date
Words 生日 shēngrì (birthday) · 日期 rìqī (date)
Seen Forms, calendar, application documents

月 *yuè*
Moon / Month
Words 月份 yuèfèn (month) · 一月 yī (yuè January)
Seen Application forms, calendars

年 *nián*
Year / Age

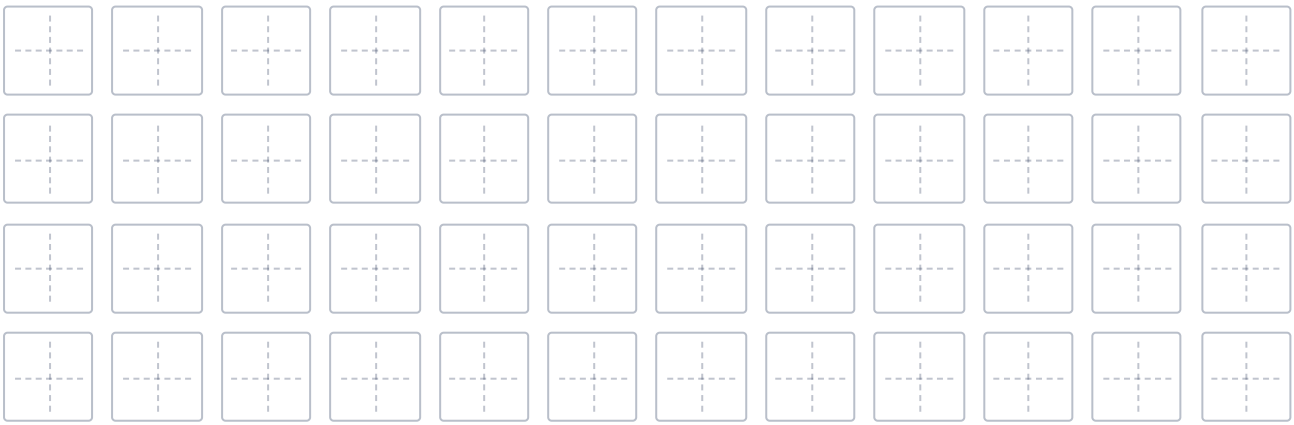
多 *duō*
Many / More
Words 年龄 niánlíng (age) · 今年 jīnnián (this year) 多少 duōshao (how many /how much) · 很多
Seen Registration forms, official paperwork Shops, price tags, questionnaires

少 *shǎo*
Few / Little
Words 少一点 shǎo (yìdiǎn a little less) · 很少 hěn
Seen Restaurant menu, ordering food

好 *hǎo*
Good / Fine
Words 很好 hěn (hǎo very good) · 好吃 hǎochī
Seen Reviews, menu comments, daily conversation

是 *shì*
Is / Am / Are
Words 我是 wǒ (shì I am) · 不是 bú (shì is not)
Seen Forms, questionnaires, basic written sentences

PRACTISE - WRITE TODAY'S CHARACTERS IN THE BOXES



SET 2 · CAMPUS & UNIVERSITY CHARACTERS

Campus & University

校 *xiào*
School / Campus
Words 学校 xuéxiào (school) · 校园 xiàoyuán
Seen University gate, campus building sign

教 *jiào*
Teach / Instruction
Words 教室 jiàoshì (classroom) · 教学 jiàoxué
Seen Teaching building door sign

师 *shī*
Teacher / Master
Words 老师 lǎoshī (teacher) · 教师 jiàoshī (instructor)
Seen Office door, class schedule

课 *kè*
Class / Lesson
Words 上课 shàngkè (attend class) · 课本 kèběn
Seen Timetable, classroom notice

楼 *lóu*
Building / Floor
Words 教学楼 jiàoxuélóu (teaching building) · 宿舍楼
Seen Every campus building entrance sign

门 *mén*
Door / Gate
Words 大门 dàmén (main gate) · 门口 ménkǒu
Seen Building gate, room door plate

室 *shì*
Room / Chamber
Words 教室 jiàoshì (classroom) · 办公室 bàngōngshì
Seen All kinds of room signs on campus

办 *bàn*
Handle / Manage
Words 办理 bànlǐ (process (formalities)) · 办公室
Seen Administration office, student-affairs notice

公 *gōng*
Public / Official
Words 办公室 bàngōngshì (office) · 公开 gōngkāi
Seen Official notice, administration building

宿 *sù*
Lodge / Accommodate
Words 宿舍 sùshè (dormitory)
Seen Student dormitory building sign

舍 *shè*
House / Dorm
Words 宿舍 sùshè (student dormitory)
Seen Dorm building, dorm registration

图 *tú*
Picture / Chart
Words 图书馆 túshūguǎn (library) · 图片 túpiàn
Seen Library entrance sign

书 *shū*
Book
Words 图书 túshū (book) · 书本 shūběn (textbook)
Seen Library, bookstore, classroom

馆 *guǎn*
Hall / Venue
Words 图书馆 túshūguǎn (library) · 体育馆 tǐyùguǎn
Seen Library, sports-building entrance

际 *jì*
Border / Inter-
Words 国际 guójì (international) · 国际学生 guójì
Seen International student office doorplate

PRACTISE - WRITE TODAY'S CHARACTERS IN THE BOXES



SET 3 · TRANSPORTATION CHARACTERS

Transportation

车 *chē*
Vehicle / Car
Words 汽车 qìchē (car) · 火车 huǒchē (train)
Seen Bus station, train station sign

站 *zhàn*
Station / Stop
Words 车站 chēzhàn (station) · 地铁站 dìtiězhàn
Seen Metro, bus, railway station everywhere

路 *lù*
Road / Route
Words 道路 dàolù (road) · 公路 gōnglù (highway)
Seen Street name plates, bus route boards

东 *dōng*
East
Words 东门 dōngmén (east gate) · 东边 dōngbiān
Seen Metro exit number, building gate sign

西 *xī*
West
Words 西门 xīmén (west gate) · 西边 xībiān (west
Seen Metro exits, campus gate signs

南 *nán*
South
Words 南门 nánmén (south gate) · 南方 nánfāng
Seen Metro exit, street signs

北 *běi*
North
Words 北门 běimén (north gate) · 北方 běifāng
Seen Metro exit, street name plates

出 *chū*
Go out / Exit
Words 出口 chūkǒu (exit) · 出去 chūqù (go out)
Seen Metro huge EXIT sign, building fire exit

入 *rù*
Enter / Entrance
Words 入口 rùkǒu (entrance) · 进入 jìnrù (enter)
Seen Metro ENTRANCE sign, building gate

地 *dì*
Ground / Land
Words 地铁 dìtiě (metro /subway) · 地方 dìfāng
Seen Metro station sign, street signs

SET 4 · FOOD & RESTAURANT CHARACTERS

Food & Restaurant

饭 *fàn*
Rice / Meal
Words 吃饭 chīfàn (eat meal) · 米饭 mǐfàn (cooked
Seen Restaurant menus, campus canteen

水 *shuǐ*
Water
Words 开水 kāishuǐ (boiled water) · 水杯 shuǐbēi
Seen Drink menu, water-vending machine

茶 *chá*
Tea
Words 喝茶 hēchá (drink tea) · 奶茶 nǎichá (milk tea)
Seen Drink shop menus, restaurant beverage list

肉 *ròu*
Meat
Words 牛肉 niúròu (beef) · 猪肉 zhūròu (pork)
Seen Food menu, canteen food label

菜 *cài*
Vegetable / Dish
Words 饭菜 fàncài (food dishes) · 蔬菜 shūcài
Seen Every restaurant menu & canteen board

米 *mǐ*
Uncooked rice
Words 米饭 mǐfàn (cooked rice) · 大米 dàmǐ (rice
Seen Food packaging, menu

面 *miàn*
Noodle / Surface
Words 面条 miàntiáo (noodles) · 面包 miànbāo
Seen Noodle restaurant menu

辣 *là*
Spicy / Hot-chili
Words 辣椒 làjiāo (chili pepper) · 不辣 bú (là not
Seen Menu spice-level tags, canteen labels

吃 *chī*
Eat
Words 吃饭 chīfàn (eat meal) · 吃东西 chī (dōngxi eat
Seen Food advertisement, menu descriptions

喝 *hē*
Drink
Words 喝水 hē (shuǐ drink water) · 喝茶 hē (chá drink
Seen Beverage menus, drink-shop signs

SET 5 · SHOPPING & PAYMENT CHARACTERS

Shopping & Payment

钱 *qián*
Money
Words 花钱 huāqián (spend money) · 有钱 yǒuqián
Seen Shops, payment counter, price notice

元 *yuán*
Chinese Yuan (CNY)
Words 一元 yì (yuán one RMB) · 五十元 wǔshí (yuán
Seen Every price tag in China

店 *diàn*
Shop / Store
Words 商店 shāngdiàn (shop) · 饭店 fàndiàn
Seen Store front signboard on streets

买 *mǎi*
Buy / Purchase
Words 买东西 mǎi (dōngxi go shopping) · 买菜 mǎi
Seen Shopping mall poster, supermarket label

卖 *mài*
Sell
Words 售卖 shòumài (sell) · 外卖 wàimài (take-away
Seen Shop signs, food delivery app screenshots

价 *jià*
Price
Words 价格 jiàgé (price) · 价钱 jiàqian (cost)
Seen Price tag, supermarket shelf label

贵 *guì*
Expensive
Words 太贵了 tài (guì le too expensive) · 很贵 hěn 便宜 piányi (cheap) · 方便 fāngbiàn
Seen Bargain conversation text, product comments Street shop bargaining, convenience-store

商 *shāng*
Business / Merchant
Words 商店 shāngdiàn (shop) · 商场 shāngchǎng
Seen Mall entrance sign

场 *chǎng*
Place / Venue
Words 商场 shāngchǎng (shopping mall) · 广场
Seen Mall, public-area signboard

有 *yǒu*
Have / There is
Words 有没有 yǒu (méiyǒu do you have) · 有的 yǒu

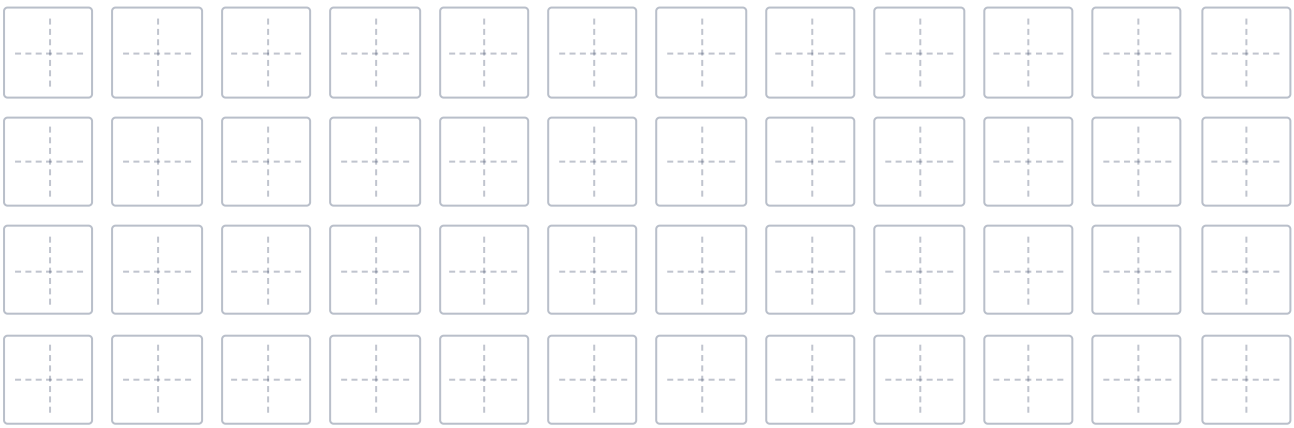
无 *wú*
No / Without
Words 无烟 wúyān (no smoking) · 无线 wúxiàn
Seen Shop questions, product labels Public warning signs, product description

收 *shōu*
Receive / Accept
Words 收款 shōukuǎn (collect payment) · 收钱
Seen Shop cashier counter sticker

付 *fù*
Pay
Words 付款 fùkuǎn (make payment) · 支付 zhīfù
Seen Payment sticker on shop counter

货 *huò*
Goods / Merchandise
Words 商品 shāngpǐn (goods) · 货物 huòwù
Seen Supermarket, shop shelf labels

PRACTISE - WRITE TODAY'S CHARACTERS IN THE BOXES



SET 6 · DIGITAL LIFE CHARACTERS

Digital Life

手 *shǒu*
Hand
Words 手机 shǒujī (mobile phone) · 手表 shǒubiǎo
Seen Phone-shop sign, instruction sticker

机 *jī*
Machine / Device
Words 手机 shǒujī (cellphone) · 计算机 jìsuànjī
Seen Electronic-shop sign, device manual

网 *wǎng*
Net / Internet
Words 网络 wǎngluò (internet) · 上网 shàngwǎng (go
Seen Wi-Fi notice, internet service sticker

码 *mǎ*
Code
Words 二维码 èr (wéi mǎ QR-code) · 号码 hàomǎ
Seen Payment QR-code sticker everywhere

支 *zhī*
Branch / Support / Pay
Words 支付 zhīfù (pay) · 支付宝 Zhīfùbǎo (Alipay)
Seen Shop payment stickers

信 *xìn*
Letter / Message / Trust
Words 微信 Wēixìn (WeChat) · 信息 xìnxī
Seen Shop payment sticker, chat-app prompt

电 *diàn*
Electric / Electricity
Words 电话 diànhuà (telephone) · 电脑 diànnǎo
Seen Phone booth, electronic-shop sign

话 *huà*
Speech / Talk
Words 电话 diànhuà (telephone) · 说话 shuōhuà
Seen Contact-information label

号 *hào*
Number / ID
Words 号码 hàomǎ (number) · 手机号 shǒujīhào
Seen Forms, SIM-card registration document

SET 7 · IMPORTANT SIGNS IN CHINA

Important Signs in China

男 *nán*
Male / Men
Words 男卫生间 nán (wèishēngjiān men's
Seen Public restroom door sign

女 *nǚ*
Female / Women
Words 女卫生间 nǚ (wèishēngjiān women's
Seen Public restroom door sign

开 *kāi*
Open / Turn-on
Words 开门 kāimén (open door) · 开水 kāishuǐ
Seen Shop business-hour notice, switch label

关 *guān*
Close / Turn-off
Words 关门 guānmén (close door) · 关闭 guānbì
Seen Shop sign, power-switch sticker

停 *tíng*
Stop / Park
Words 停车 tíngchē (parking) · 停止 tíngzhǐ (stop)
Seen Parking sign, traffic notice

危 *wēi*
Danger / Hazard
Words 危险 wēixiǎn (danger)
Seen Safety warning board

禁 *jìn*
Forbidden / Prohibit
Words 禁止 jìnzhǐ (forbidden) · 禁烟 jìnyān
Seen All kinds of prohibition warning signs

注 *zhù*
Notice / Pay attention
Words 注意 zhùyì (attention) · 注释 zhùshì (note)
Seen Public safety reminder notice

烟 *yān*
Smoke / Tobacco
Words 禁烟 jìnyān (no-smoking) · 香烟 xiāngyān
Seen No-smoking public signs

火 *huǒ*
Fire
Words 防火 fánghuǒ (fire-prevention) · 火车 huǒchē
Seen Fire-safety warning posters

安 *ān*
Safe / Peace
Words 安全 ānquán (safety) · 平安 (safe and sound)
Seen Public-safety reminder sign

勿 *wù*
Do not / Must not
Words 勿碰 wù (pèng do not touch) · 勿入 wù (rù do
Seen Short formal public warning signs

可 *kě*
Can / Allowed
Words 可以 kěyǐ (can /may) · 可用 kěyòng (available)
Seen Permission-notice sticker

SCREENSHOT THIS ONE

Twenty to recognise by the end of week one

人 *rén*	大 *dà*	小 *xiǎo*	中 *zhōng*	国 *guó*	学 *xué*	生 *shēng*	日 *rì*	月 *yuè*	年 *nián*
水 *shuǐ*	饭 *fàn*	菜 *cài*	钱 *qián*	买 *mǎi*	店 *diàn*	站 *zhàn*	车 *chē*	出 *chū*	入 *rù*

Test yourself: cover the pinyin and read the row out loud. Any character you cannot say is tomorrow's review - ten characters a day beats one long evening.

CHARACTERS YOU MET THIS WEEK - WRITE THEM HERE

Cover and recall: hide this page, say each character's pinyin out loud, then check. Anything you miss goes back into tomorrow's ten minutes of review.

Free China downloads

Scan for the full library of printable checklists, phrase sheets and guides.

Chinese Characters for Beginners - *the full online list*

Chinese Pinyin Guide - *read any pinyin you see*

Reading Chinese Signs and Labels - *what the signs actually say*

Chinese Flashcards Done Right - *a review system that sticks*

Disclaimer: this pack is a recognition aid for international students, not a certified language course. Pinyin and meanings are given for everyday usage; some characters carry extra readings and regional variants. Always follow your university's own Chinese course and HSK materials for assessment.
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