

Hacking Chinese



Practical exercises

How to talk about Chinese characters in Chinese

<http://www.hackingchinese.com/talk-chinese-characters-chinese/>

Learning by teaching

Teaching someone else is one of the most powerful ways of learning because it encourages you to process the information and then summarise it using your own words, making sure that you understand it well. Imagine someone who knows nothing about Chinese asking you the questions below, then try to answer them. Feel free to speak, write, draw, act or anything else you think might help.

- Why can't you spell a character in Chinese?
- How do native speakers talk about characters then?
- What problems might this cause language learners?

Studying on your own

The following exercises are meant to be done mostly on your own, although you might need a teacher or a helpful friend to check some of the answers.

- Do the challenges in the article itself and check your answers in the first comment to the article. Use the audio version of the article for an extra challenge.
- Learn the most common colloquial names for radicals (all of them if you're not a beginner). You can find them in my list [here](#).
- Learn to describe the characters in your Chinese name by using one XY 的 X construction for each character. Check your construction so they make sense for native speakers as well.

Interacting with others

These exercises require you to talk with a native speaker. Some are directly focused on language learning and are best done with a teacher or language-exchange partner, others can be done with any native speaker in normal conversations, even if practising Chinese is not the main point.

- Play a character-guessing game with a native speaker. Select only characters well within your knowledge range. The goal is to get the other person to guess the right character as quickly as possible. You're only allowed to say things and only in Chinese, but you can say whatever you want. Switch roles.

- Ask someone what their name is in Chinese, then follow up by trying to figure out what characters they use, first by trying to identify the characters, then by describing the characters if necessary. Write only if this fails or if you want to check you got it right. For more practice, expand to the names of family, friends, acquaintances and so on.
- Next time someone uses a word you don't know, ask for clarification and try to guess the character using “is it XY 的 X?” type of questions. Keep guessing. If you fail, ask your conversation partner to give you clues. If you still don't know or perhaps just want to make sure you got it right, ask him or her to write it down.

That's all for this week, good luck with your studying!

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