



How can breaking down a character in Chinese help me remember it?

What is the deal with Chinese writing? Chinese doesn't use an alphabet, but rather has thousands of individual characters that have to be learned. It sounds like an impossible task, but these characters aren't completely random and arbitrary. Most characters will have one "part" that has to do with their meaning (this is often referred to as a radical, but that's another article altogether), and one "part" that has to do with its pronunciation. As you study Chinese, you will find that a lot of these "parts" appear in many characters, so the thousands of characters become more like remembering a few hundred of these "parts". We'll take one example from the first lessons in Chinese 1101, the verb 请 (qǐng), meaning to invite. It has two components 讠, the radical/meaning part often found in words related to speech, and the phonetic 青 (qīng), giving us a basic pronunciation.

讠 (yán) is the meaning part (radical) and tells us that this word has to do with speech or language	The phonetic part "qīng" 青 helps us guess the word is probably pronounced as either qing or has -ing as its final.
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We do have to be a bit careful, as sometimes a character can contain a phonetic part like "qīng" (青) but not be pronounced with an -ing in it, and tone is another story altogether. But in general, most of the time remembering these parts, both sound and meaning will help you remember the character that goes with the pronunciation. For example, we'll take a look at a few characters from the Chinese 1100 level and 2000 level courses, and use the appearance of the sound "part" to help us write them.

讠 Qiān (Characters containing this will often have a "-ian" or "-an" ending)		
签证	qiānzhèng	Visa
实验室	shíyànshì	Laboratory
检查	jiǎnchá	To check
青 qīng (Characters containing this will often be pronounced "qing" or end in -ing)		
请	qǐng	To invite
安静	ānjìng	Quiet
事情	shìqing	The matter of (business, event, affair)
召 zhao (Characters containing this will often have a "-hao" ending)		
照片	zhàopiàn	Picture, photograph
超级	chāojí	Super
招	zhāo	To recruit

Pretty cool, huh? Did you enjoy this article? Let us know! This article was assembled from a combination of the Chinese 1000 and 2000 level textbook, Integrated Chinese, as well as the Internet dictionaries www.zdic.net and www.nciku.com.