

Understanding Radicals

Every Chinese character has a radical or is itself a radical. There are 214 radicals today. For example, 女 is the character for woman. It is also the radical for many female things: 姐姐 = little sister, 妈妈 = mamma, etc.

Radicals are used to tell something about the meaning of the character, such as 钅 is made of metal, 亻 is tall, etc.

Radicals are also used to look up characters in a dictionary. To find a character you look for the radical in a radical list. When you have found your radical you count the remaining number of strokes in the character. With this information it is now possible to find the character.

Group: People

Radical	English Meaning	Examples
人 亻	Man	你 今
力	Power	动 (動) 加
口	Mouth	吃 可 右 哭 和
女	Woman	好 妻
心 忄 忝	Heart	忙 念 忝 (愛) 恭
扌 手	Hand	把 拿 拜 才

Group: Animal

Radical	English Meaning	Examples
牛 牛	Ox	物 犀
犭 犬	Dog	狗 伏
虫	Insect	蚊 蜜 蝕 (蝕)
马 (馬)	Horse	骑 (騎) 冯 (馮) 驾 (駕)
鱼 (魚)	Fish	鲜 (鮮) 鲁 (魯) 鲨 (鯊)
鸟 (鳥)	Bird	鸣 (鳴) 鸵

Group: Actions

Radical	English Meaning	Examples
彳	Left Step	很 往
辶 (辵)	Run and Stop	这 (這) 过 (過)

Group: Home

Radical	English Meaning	Examples
刂 刀	Knife	别 到 分
宀	Roof	家 宝
衤 衣	Clothing	衫 裳 裹