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Heisig/Remembering the Kanji 1, 6th Edition

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Lesson 1

LET US BEGIN with a group of 15 kanji, all of which you probably knew before you ever cracked the covers of this book. Each kanji has been provided with a single *key word* to represent the basic meaning. Some of these characters will also serve later as *primitive elements* to help form other kanji, when they will take a meaning different from the meaning they have as kanji. Although it is not necessary at this stage to memorize the special primitive meaning of these characters, a special remark preceded by a star (*) has been appended to alert you to the change in meaning.

The *number of strokes* of each character is given in square brackets at the end of each explanation, followed by the stroke-by-stroke *order of writing*. It cannot be stressed enough how important it is to learn to write each kanji in its proper order. As easy as these first characters may seem, study them all with a pad and pencil to get into the habit from the very start.

Finally, note that each key word has been carefully chosen and should not be tampered with in any way if you want to avoid confusion later on.

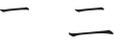
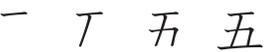
1

one

— In Chinese characters, the number **one** is laid on its side, unlike the Roman numeral I which stands upright. As you would expect, it is written from left to right. [1]

—

* As a primitive element, the key-word meaning is discarded, since it is too abstract to be of much help. Instead, the single horizontal stroke takes on the meaning of *floor* or *ceiling*, depending on its position: if it stands above another primitive, it means *ceiling*; if below, *floor*.

<p>2</p> 	<p style="text-align: right;">two</p> <p>Like the Roman numeral II, which reduplicates the numeral I, the kanji for two is a simple reduplication of the horizontal stroke that means <i>one</i>. The order of writing goes from above to below, with the first stroke slightly shorter. [2]</p> 
<p>3</p> 	<p style="text-align: right;">three</p> <p>And like the Roman numeral III, which triples the numeral I, the kanji for three simply triples the single horizontal stroke. In writing it, think of “1 + 2 = 3” (一 + 二 = 三) in order to keep the middle stroke shorter. [3]</p> 
<p>4</p> 	<p style="text-align: right;">four</p> <p>This kanji is composed of two primitive elements, <i>mouth</i> 凵 and <i>human legs</i> 儿, both of which we will meet in the coming lessons. Assuming that you already knew how to write this kanji, we will pass over the “story” connected with it until later.</p> <p>Note how the second stroke is written left-to-right and then top-to-bottom. This is consistent with what we have already seen in the first three numbers and leads us to a general principle that will be helpful when we come to more complicated kanji later on: WRITE NORTH-TO-SOUTH, WEST-TO-EAST, NORTHWEST-TO-SOUTHEAST. [5]</p> 
<p>5</p> 	<p style="text-align: right;">five</p> <p>As with <i>four</i>, we shall postpone learning the primitive elements that make up this character. Note how the general principle we just learned in the preceding frame applies to the writing of the character for five. [4]</p> 

<p>6 六</p>	<p>six</p> <p>The primitives here are <i>top hat</i> and <i>animal legs</i>. Once again, we glide over them until later. [4]</p> <p>丷 一 六 六</p>
<p>7 七</p>	<p>seven</p> <p>Note that the first stroke “cuts” through the second. This distinguishes seven from the character for <i>spoon</i> 匕 (FRAME 476), in which the horizontal stroke stops short. [2]</p> <p>一 七</p> <p>* As a primitive, this form takes on the meaning of <i>diced</i>, i.e., “cut” into little pieces, consistent both with the way the character is written and with its association with the kanji for <i>cut</i> 切 to be learned in a later lesson (FRAME 89).</p>
<p>8 八</p>	<p>eight</p> <p>Just as the Arabic numeral “8” is composed of a small circle followed by a larger one, so the kanji for eight is composed of a short line followed by a longer line, slanting towards it but not touching it. And just as the “lazy 8” ∞ is the mathematical symbol for “infinity,” so the expanse opened up below these two strokes is associated by the Japanese with the sense of an infinite expanse or something “all-encompassing.” [2]</p> <p>ノ 八</p>
<p>9 九</p>	<p>nine</p> <p>If you take care to remember the stroke order of this kanji, you will not have trouble later keeping it distinct from the kanji for <i>power</i> 力 (FRAME 922). [2]</p> <p>ノ 九</p>

* As a primitive, we shall use this kanji to mean *baseball team* or simply *baseball*. The meaning, of course, is derived from the *nine* players who make up a team.

10

ten



Turn this character 45° either way and you have the x used for the Roman numeral **ten**. [2]



* As a primitive, this character sometimes keeps its meaning of *ten* and sometimes signifies *needle*, this latter derived from the kanji for *needle* 針 (FRAME 292). Since the primitive is used in the kanji itself, there is no need to worry about confusing the two. In fact, we shall be following this procedure regularly.

11

mouth



Like several of the first characters we shall learn, the kanji for **mouth** is a clear pictograph. Since there are no circular shapes in the kanji, the square must be used to depict the circle. [3]



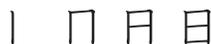
* As a primitive, this form also means *mouth*. Any of the range of possible images that the word suggests—an opening or entrance to a cave, a river, a bottle, or even the largest hole in your head—can be used for the primitive meaning.

12

day



This kanji is intended to be a pictograph of the sun. Recalling what we said in the previous frame about round forms, it is easy to detect the circle and the big smile that characterize our simplest drawings of the sun—like those yellow badges with the words, “Have a nice **day!**” [4]



* Used as a primitive, this kanji can mean *sun* or *day* or a *tongue wagging in the mouth*. This latter meaning, incidentally, derives from an old character outside the standard list meaning something like “sayeth” and written almost exactly the same, except that the stroke in the middle does not touch the right side (𠄎, FRAME 620).

13

month

月

This character is actually a picture of the moon, with the two horizontal lines representing the left eye and mouth of the mythical “man in the moon.” (Actually, the Japanese see a hare in the moon, but it is a little farfetched to find one in the kanji.) And one **month**, of course, is one cycle of the moon. [4]

𠄎 月 月 月

* As a primitive element, this character can take on the sense of *moon*, *flesh*, or *part of the body*. The reasons for the latter two meanings will be explained in a later chapter.

14

rice field

田

Another pictograph, this kanji looks like a bird’s-eye view of a **rice field** divided into four plots. Be careful when writing this character to get the order of the strokes correct. You will find that it follows perfectly the principle stated in FRAME 4. [5]

丨 凵 𠄎 𠄎 田

* When used as a primitive element, the meaning of *rice field* is most common, but now and again it will take the meaning of *brains* from the fact that it looks a bit like that tangle of gray matter nestled under our skulls.

15

eye

目

Here again, if we round out the corners of this kanji and curve the middle strokes upwards and downwards respectively, we get something resembling an eye. [5]

丨 凵 冂 月 目

* As a primitive, the kanji keeps its sense of *eye*, or to be more specific, an *eyeball*. When placed in the surroundings of a complex kanji, the primitive will sometimes be turned on its side like this: 𠄎.

Although only 9 of the 15 kanji treated in this lesson are formally listed as primitives—the elements that join together to make up other kanji—some of the others may also take on that function from time to time, only not with enough frequency to merit learning them as separate primitive elements and attaching special meanings to them. In other words, whenever one of the kanji already learned is used in another kanji, it will retain its key-word meaning unless we have assigned it a special primitive meaning.

Lesson 2

IN THIS LESSON we learn what a “primitive element” is by using the first 15 characters as pieces that can be fitted together to form new kanji—19 of them to be exact. Whenever the primitive meaning differs from the key-word meaning, you may want to go back to the original frame to refresh your memory. From now on, though, you should learn *both* the key word and the primitive meaning of new kanji as they appear. An INDEX OF PRIMITIVE ELEMENTS has been added at the end of the book.

16

古

The primitive elements that compose this character are *ten* and *mouth*, but you may find it easier to remember it as a pictograph of a tombstone with a cross on top. Just think back to one of those graveyards you have visited, or better still, used to play in as a child, with **old** inscriptions on the tombstones.

This departure from the primitive elements in favor of a picto-

old