

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about autumn

成

Putonghua pronunciation: *cheng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing4*

Meanings: fulfill, achieve, complete, succeed, harvest

成 means successful/success. Farmers watch crops 成長 (*cheng2 zhang3* = mature-grow), await autumn's 收成 (*shou1 cheng2* = collecting~harvest). Larva becomes 成蟲 (*cheng2 chong2* = adult-insect). 成人 (*cheng2 ren2* = adults) have 成熟 (*cheng2 shou2* = fulfill-ripe = mature) views.

Businessman 成立 (*cheng2 li4* = fulfill~stand = establishes) enterprise, 成功 (*cheng2 gong1* = complete~achieve = succeeds), produces 成績 (*cheng2 ji2* = complete~record = achievements), gains 成就 (*cheng2 jiu4* = fulfill~arrive = achievements). 大器晚成 (*da4 qi4 wan3 cheng2* = big~vessel-night/late~succeed) describes late achievers. Disillusioned person disregards 成敗 (*cheng2 bai4* = success/victory~failure/defeat).

We say “成!” (*xing2* = Yes, OK, agreed!) for agreement/approval, “不成!” = “不行!” (*bu1 xing2* = “No!”) for objection/disapproval.

by Diana Yue