

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



Putonghua pronunciation: *feng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fung1*

Meanings: abundant, lush, bountiful, plentiful

Ideogram 豐 shows top-container holding jade pieces and bottom-container 豆 (*dou4*, beans/container), hence 豐 means rich/abundant: 豐富 (*feng1 fu4* = abundant~rich) food/experience, 豐厚 (*feng1 hou4* = abundant~thick/piled-up) income/assets, 豐盛 (*feng1 sheng4* = abundant~lush = rich) banquet/life/blessings.

Anticipating 豐收 (*feng1 shou1* = abundant~harvest), 豐年 (*feng1 nian2* = good-harvest~year), Chinese New Year pictures carry blessing “人壽年豐” (*ren2 shou4 nian2 feng1* = people~longevity~year~abundant = "Wishing everyone longevity and good harvest!")

體態豐滿 (*ti3 tai4 feng1 man3* = body~shape~swell~full) describes woman with luscious curves. In planning expenses, 豐儉由人 (*feng1 jian4 you2 ren2* = abundant~frugal~allow~person) means big or small budget is for spender to decide. 匯豐銀行 (*hui4 feng1 yin2 hang2* = credit~abundant~money~hong/bank) is HSBC's Chinese name.

by Diana Yue