

# Character Builder

# 您好學嗎？

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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

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

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

4<sup>th</sup> 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 short lives

折

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhe1, zhe2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jit3*

Meaning: twist, bend, break, discount, section

折 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means 拗折 (*ao3 zhe2* = bend-bent), 折斷 (*zhe2 duan4* = bend-break), 轉折 (*zhuan3 zhe1* = turn-bend = twists and turns), 折扣 (*zhe2 kou4* = bend-subtract) means sale discounts, e.g. 七折 (*qi1 zhe2* = seven-subtract = 30% off).

Dancer suffers 骨折 (*gu3 zhe2* = bones-broken), defies 挫折 (*cuo4 zhe2* = fall-bend = defeats/failures). Fans 折服 (*zhe2 fu2* = bend-humbly-respect = adore) him.

War-refugees encounter 波折 (*bo1 zhe2* = wave-twist = mishaps), 折磨 (*zhe2 mo2* = bend-grind = physical/mental torment). Starved children 童年夭折 (*tong2 nian2 yao1 zhe2* = young-age-young-shoot-break = die young, in childhood). Sage sighs: War-mongers 折福 (*zhe2 fu2* = break/discount-fortune/blessing = won't get their share of heaven's blessings)!

by Diana Yue