

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 furniture

桌

Putonghua pronunciation: *chuo1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cheuk3*

Meaning: table, desk

桌 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) = 桌子 (*zhuo1 zi0* = table-diminutive) = table: 飯桌 (*fan4 zhuo1* = eat/dining- table), 書桌 (*shu1 zhuo1* = book-table = writing desk), 桌布 (*zhuo1 bu4* = table-cloth). Tiffany makes beautiful 桌燈 (*zhuo1 deng1* = table/desk-lamps).

八仙桌 (*ba1 xian1 zhuo1* = eight-immortals-table) is 方桌 (*fang1 zhuo1* = square-table) allowing eight diners 同桌 (*tong2 zhuo1* = same/sharing-table). Academics/politicians hold 圓桌會議 (*yuan2 zhuo1 hui4 yi4* = round-table-discussions). British universities keep 高桌晚餐 (*gao1 zhuo1 wan3 can1* = high-table-evening-dinner) tradition.

Gamblers at 賭桌 (*du3 zhuo1* = gambling-table) show cards/ stakes on 桌面上 (*zhuo1 mian4 shang1* = table-surface-on = on the table). Angry loser 拍桌子 (*pai1 zhuo1 zi0* = bang-the-table).

by Diana Yue