

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 missing persons

Putonghua pronunciation: *chá*²

Cantonese pronunciation: *chá*⁴

Meanings: search, check, examine, inspect, investigate

查 = search/check. 查問 (*chá*² *wèn*⁴ = check~question) = ask/cross-examine. 查閱 (*chá*² *yue*⁴ = check~read) = search books/records. 巡查 (*xún*² *chá*² = tour~check) = do inspection-rounds. 調查 (*diao*⁴ *chá*² = collect/select~check) = investigate. 查清楚 (*chá*² *qīng*¹ *chū*³ = check~clean~clear) = obtain accurate findings.

Accountant 查賬 (*chá*² *zhàng*⁴ = examine/vet~accounts). Patient needs 身體檢查 (*shēn*¹ *tǐ*³ *jiǎn*³ *chá*² = body~pick-up~check = physical check-up). Boss orders employees to 查找不足 (*chá*² *zhǎo*³ *bù*⁴ *zú*² = check~search~not~enough = reflect on mistakes/inadequacies).

Police 明查暗訪 (*míng*² *chá*² *àn*⁴ *fǎng*³ = bright~check~dark~visit = conduct open/secret searches), 查出 (*chá*² *chū*¹ = check~out = successfully find) kidnapped children's whereabouts, 查不出 (*chá*² *bù*⁴ *chū*¹ = check~not~out = cannot find/determine) kidnapper's identity.

by Diana Yue