

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 raising families

擔

Putonghua pronunciation: *dan1, dan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *daam3*

Meanings: weight, load carried on shoulder-pole, burden

Noun 擔 (*dan4*) = loads (of grains/coal) suspended from two ends of shoulder-pole. 千斤重擔 (*qian1 jin1 zhong4 dan4* = thousand-catties-heavy-burden) = extremely heavy burden. Verb 擔 (*dan1*) = carry burden: 承擔 (*cheng2 dan1* = accept-shoulder) responsibility, 擔任 (*dan1 ren4* = burden-act-as = serve) post, 擔保 (*dan1 bao3* = burden-protect = act as guarantor).

Parents shoulder 生活擔子 (*sheng1 huo2 dan4 zi0* = exist-live-burden-diminutive = burden of earning livelihood), 擔驚受怕 (*dan1 jing1 shou4 pa4* = shoulder-fright-receive-fear = feel fears/worries) when child is ill, 擔心 (*dan1 xin1* = burden-heart = worry/care for) children's future.

Birth control slogan “三個斷擔挑!” (*san1 ge4 duan4 dan4 tiaol* = three-kid-units-break-burden-pole) = “Having/raising three kids will make you collapse!”

by Diana Yue