

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 high-speed trains



Putonghua pronunciation: *zuo4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *joh6*

Meanings: sit, board

坐 = sit: “坐下!” (*zuo4 xia4* = “Sit~down!”), “請坐!” (*qing3 zuo4* = please~sit = “Take a seat!”) Convicts 坐牢 (*zuo4 lao2* = sit~jail = serve jail sentence). Buddhist monks 坐禪 (*zuo4 chan2* = sit~zen = sit in spiritual meditation). After giving birth, women 坐月 (*zuo4 yue4* = sit~month = rest for a month).

Passengers 坐車 (*zuo4 che1* = sit~car = board/travel-by~car), 坐船 (*zuo4 chuan2* = sit~boat = board/travel-by~boat), 坐火車 (*zuo4 huo3 che1* = sit~fire~car = board/travel-by~train). 坐頭等 (*zuo4 tou2 deng3* = sit~head~level) = go first-class.

坐井觀天 (*zuo4 jing3 guan1 tian1* = sit-in~well~watch~sky) describes ignorant person’s narrow viewpoint/horizon. 坐享其成 (*zuo4 xiang3 qi2 cheng2* = sit~enjoy~’s~success) means effortlessly reaping/receiving gains.

by Diana Yue