

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 body-checks

抽

Putonghua pronunciation: *chou1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chau1*

Meaning: draw, suck, take out, extract, develop, lash

抽 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means take/draw/pull/extract. 抽屜 (*chou1 ti4* = draw-tray) = drawer. 抽空 (*chou1 kong1* = take-empty/unoccupied) = squeeze out time. Government 抽稅 (*chou1 shui4* = demands-taxes). Agent 抽佣 (*chou1 yong4* = takes-commission). 抽象 (*chou1 xiang4* = extract-image) = abstract.

Chinese cooking uses 生抽 (*sheng1 chou1* = raw-drawn/pressed = light soy-sauce), 老抽 (*lao3 chou1* = old-drawn = dark soy-sauce). But 釜底抽薪 (*fu2 di3 chou1 xin1* = pot-bottom-take-away-firewood) is clever strategy of removing source of threat/damage to halt/ease crisis.

抽鴉片 (*chou1 ya1 pian4* = sucking/smoking-"o-pium"-transliterated), 抽煙 (*chou1 yan1* = suck-smoke = smoking cigarettes), 抽大麻 (*chou1 da4 ma2* = smoking-marijuana) affect health. Body-check includes 抽血 (*chou1 xue3* = taking-blood) sample.

by Diana Yue