

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

床

Putonghua pronunciation: *chuang2*
Cantonese pronunciation: *chong4*
Meaning: bed

床 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) = bed: 床架 (*chuang2 jia4* = bed-frame), 木床 (*mu4 chuang2* = wooden-bed), 鐵床 (*tie3 chuang2* = iron/metal-bed), 床褥 (*chuang2 ru4* = bed-mattress/futon), 床鋪 (*chuang2 pu1* = bed-bedding). 起床 (*qi3 chuang2* = rise-bed) = get up. 上床 (*shang4 chuang2* = mount-bed) = get into bed. Hotels offer 雙人床 (*shuang1 ren2 chuang2* = pair/double-beds), 單人床 (*dan1 ren2 chuang2* = single-beds), 嬰兒床 (*ying1 er2 chuang2* = baby-beds/cots), 榻榻米 (*ta4 ta4 mi3* = Japanese "tatami"-transliterated = futon).

床頭人 (*chuang2 tou2 ren2* = bed's-head-board-person) = spouse/partner. 床上戲 (*chuang2 shang4 xi4* = bed-on-drama) = sex/porn scenes. 床頭金盡 (*chuang2 tou2 jin1 jin 4* = bed's-head-board-gold-exhausted) describes person completely broke.

by Diana Yue