

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 waltzes

舞

Putonghua pronunciation: *wu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mo5*

Meanings: dance, wield, wave, manipulate

舞 (radical 舛 *chuan3*, feet oppositely faced) means dance/wave: 舞蹈 (*wu3 dao3* = dance~step = dance/dancing), 揮舞 (*hui1 wu3* = wave~wield = wave) hankie/flag. 手舞足蹈 (*shou3 wu3 zhu1 dao4* = hands~wave~feet~dance/swing) = gestures of excitement. Swordsman/dancer 舞劍 (*wu3 jian4* = waves~sword = does fancy gestures with sword).

舞者 (*wu3 zhe3* = dancers) perform 芭蕾舞 (*ba1 lei2 wu3* = “ballet”-transliterated~dance), 探戈 (*tan4 ge1* = “tango”-transliterated), 踢踏舞 (*ti1 ta1 wu3* = “tap”-transliterated~dance). 社交舞 (*she4 jiao1 wu3* = social-intercourse~dance) = social dancing.

Socialites love 舞會 (*wu3 hui4* = dance~meet = balls). 跳華爾滋 (*tiao4 hua2 er3 zi1* = jump~“waltz”-transliterated = waltzing) requires 曼妙舞姿 (*man4 miao4 wu3 zi1* = graceful/prolonged~wonderful~dance~posture~) = unhurried/elegant dance-movements.

by Diana Yue