

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 beggars

浪

Putonghua pronunciation: *lang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *long6*

Meanings: wave, wander, unrestrained, rambling, homeless

浪 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 波浪 (*bo1 lang4* = billows-waves). 浪花 (*lang4 hua1* = wave-flower) = spray. 浪費 (*lang4 fei4* = wave/unrestrained-spend) = wasting. 大風大浪 (*da4 feng1 da4 lang4* = big-winds-big-waves) describes stormy/battering sea/circumstances. 風平浪靜 (*feng1 ping2 lang4 jing4* = winds-calm-waves-quiet) means calm/uneventful.

Knight-errant 浪跡天涯 (*lang4 ji1 tian1 ya2* = wander-track-sky's-edge = drifts a over the world). 浪子回頭 (*lang4 zi3 hui2 tou2* = wandering-son-turns-back-head) describes undisciplined/delinquent person reforming himself. 浪得虛名 (*lang4 de2 xu1 ming2* = undeservedly-acquire-empty-name) describes famous people/brands lacking substance.

浪人 (*lang4 ren2*, Japanese kanji pronounced "ronin", i.e. roaming-person) means unemployed/homeless samurai. Beggars are usually 流浪漢 (*liu2 lang4 han4* = flow-wave-men = homeless drifters/tramps).

by Diana Yue