

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 quarrelling

指

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi3*
Cantonese pronunciation: *ji2*
Meanings: point, finger, order

指 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means 手指 (*shou3 zhi3* = hand-point = finger). Actions 指定 (*zhi3 ding4* = point-fix = appoint/designate), 指示 (*zhi3 shi4* = point-demonstrate = order/instruct) use 食指 (*shi2 zhi3* = eat-finger = index finger). General 指揮 (*zhi3 hui1* = point-wave = orders/commands) army.

Professor 指導 (*zhi3 dao3* = guides-leads/supervises) students, 指出 (*zhi3 chu1* = points-out) mistakes, 指責 (*zhi3 ze2* = point-rebuke = denounces/condemns) plagiarism. Fortune-teller 指點迷津 (*zhi3 dian3 mi2 jin1* = finger-point-lost-stream-source = suggests ways to seek good fate, avoid ill-luck). However, 指指點點 (*zhi3 zhi3 dian3 dian3* = finger-finger-point-point) means nosy-poker/snob's finger-pointing.

Sly slanderer 指桑罵槐 (*zhi3 sang1 ma4 huai2* = point-at-mullberry-tree-rebuke-locust-tree = rebukes A while implying/targeting B).

by Diana Yue