

Character Builder

您好學？

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 circuses

技

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gei6*

Meanings: skill, technique, knack

技 (扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand + 支 *zhi1*, support) means 技能 (*ji4 neng2* = skill-ability), 技術 (*ji4 shu4* = technique-technology), 技巧 (*ji4 qiao3* = skill-dexterity), 一技傍身 (*yi1 ji4 bang4 shen1* = one-skill-accompanying-body = training in one area) helps 技工 (*ji4 gong1* = skilled-worker/technician) survive.

技癢 (*ji4 yang3* = skill-itch) = yearning to perform. 技窮 (*ji4 qiong2* = skill-exhaust) = running out of tricks/solutions. 雕蟲小技 (*diao1 chong2 xiao3 ji4* = carving-insect-small/lowly-skill) means un-praiseworthy knack or artist's modest description of his work.

雜技 (*za2 ji4* = mixed-skills) = tricks/acrobatics. Viewers watching 特技 (*te4 ji4* = special-skill = stunts) shout: “神乎其技!” (*shen2 hu1 qi2 ji4* = god/supernatural-oh-his-skill = “Incredible/Marvellous!”)

by Diana Yue