

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 electricity

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meaning: ware, utensil, instrument, appliance

器 (showing four 口 *kou3*, mouths/openings) means 器具 (*qi4 jü4* = utensil-instrument): 容器 (*rong2 qi4* = container-utensil), 兵器 (*bing1 qi4* = army-instruments = weapons), 器官 (*qi4 guan1* = utensil-commander = body organs), 生殖器 (*sheng1 zhi2 qi4* = born-multiply-organ = male/female reproductive organ).

Archeologists study 青銅器 (*qing1 tong2 qi4* = blue-green-bronze-utensil/container = ancient bronzes), 陶瓷器 (*tao2 ci2 qi4* = clay-porcelain-ware = ceramics). 不成器 (*bu4 cheng2 qi4* = un-successful-ware) means spoilt/sub-standard pottery/porcelain product or failed person.

家用電器 (*jia1 yong4 dian4 qi4* = home-used-electric-appliances) include 電爐 (*dian4 lu2* = electric-stove/heater), 電冰箱 (*dian4 bing1 xiang1* = electric-ice-box = refrigerator), 電扇 (*dian4 shan4* = electric-fan), 電飯煲 (*dian4 fan4 bao1* = electric-rice-cooker).

by Diana Yue