

Character Builder 您好學? 好

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 removing obstacles

Putonghua pronunciation: **chan3**

Cantonese pronunciation: **chaan2**

Meaning: spade, shovel, scrape, spatula

鏟 (radical 金 *jin1*, metal/gold) = 鏟子 (*chan3 zi0* = spade/shovel-diminutive = spade/shovel): 鐵鏟 (*tie3 chan3* = iron-shovel), 一鏟 (*yi1 chan3* = one-spade-ful), 煤鏟 (*mei2 chan3* = coal-shovel), 鏟土機 (*chan3 tu3 ji1* = spade/scrape-earth-machine = earth scraper) 鏟泥 (*chan3 ni2* = scrapes-up-mud), 鏟沙 (*chan3 sha1* = scrapes-up-sand), 鏟走 (*chan3 zou3* = shovel-run/off/away = removes) debris.

Cantonese expression 揸鑊鏟 (*zha1 huo4 chan2* = Cantonese *jal wok6 chaan2* = hold/wield-pan/wok-spatula) means “work as a cook”. Chef demonstrates stir-fry with spatula: 鏟鬆 (*chaan3 song1* = scrapes-loose/apart) diced morsels, 鏟起 (*chan3 qi3* = shovels-up) on to plate.

Dictator 鏟除 (*chan3 chu2* = shovel-remove = eliminates) enemies. Rebellion gets 鏟平 (*chan3 ping2* = shovel-level/flat = leveled/razed to the ground).

by Diana Yue