

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 Solomon's wisdom

Putonghua pronunciation: **zheng1**

Cantonese pronunciation: **jang1**

Meanings: compete, vie, fight for

Ideogram 爭 shows hands (𠂇 and 𠂇) wrangling for object in middle: 競爭 (**jing4 zheng1** = compete~fight), 爭執 (**zheng1 zhi2** = fight~hold-fast = quarrel), 爭吵 (**zheng1 chao3** = quarrel~shout). 爭先恐後 (**zheng1 xian1 kong3 hou4** = compete-for~before~fear~behind) = scramble to jump queue.

Brothers 爭家產 (**zheng1 jia1 chan3** = fight-over~family~assets). Catwalk models 爭妍鬥麗 (**zhengt1 yan2 dou4 li4** = vie~lovely~compete~beautiful = flaunt eye-catching make-ups/outfits). Swimmers 爭分奪秒 (**zheng1 fen2 duo2 miao3** = vie~minute~snatch~second = fight every second) to 爭取 (**zheng1 qu3** = strive-for~achieve) world record.

Communists launch 階級鬥爭 (**jie1 ji2 dou4 zheng1** = step-class~battle~fight = class struggle). 與世無爭 (**yü3 shi4 wu2 zheng1** = with~world~no~quarrel/compete) describes lifestyle/philosophy of people without ambitions/enemies.

by Diana Yue