

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 choirs

指

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji2*

Meanings: finger, point, command

指 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means 手指 (*shou3 zhi3* = hand~point = finger). 食指 (*shi2 zhi3* = eat~finger) = index finger. 恆生指數 (*Heng2 Sheng1 zhi3 shu4* = Hang~Seng~index~number) = HKSE's Hang Seng Index. 指南 (*zhi3 nan2* = point~south) means guide/manual pamphlet.

Professor 指導 (*zhi3 dao3* = point~guide = supervises) students, 指出 (*zhi3 chu1* = points~out) mistakes, 指責 (*zhi3 ze2* = point~rebuke = attacks/condemns) plagiarism. Hegemonic power's 指指點點 (*zhi3 zhi3 dian3 dian3* = point~point~dot~dot = criticism/accusation/finger-pointing) 劍指 (*jian4 zhi3* = sword~point = targets/menaces) neighboring state.

總指揮 (*zhong3 zhi3 hui1* = main~point~wave) = commander-in-chief. Orchestra/choir's 指揮 (*zhi3 hui1* = point~wave = conductor) uses 指揮棒 (*zhi3 hui1 bang4* = point~wave~stick/rod = baton).

by Diana Yue