

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 quarrelling

激

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gik1*

Meanings: stir, shake, stimulate, irritate, heated, emotional

激 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = stir/stimulate/irritate. Music 激發 (*ji1 fa1* = stirs-up) listener's 激情 (*ji1 qing2* = violent-emotions/passions). Student expresses 感激 (*gan3 ji1* = feel-passionate = gratitude) to mentor. 激素 (*ji1 su4* = stimulating-essence) = hormone. 激光 (*ji1 guang1* = stimulated-light/ray/beam) = LASER.

Conservatives dislike 激進派 (*ji1 jin4 pai4* = passionate-advance-sect = radicals), denounce their 激烈 (*ji1 lie* = stirred-up-strong = violent) actions as 過激 (*guo4 ji1* = over-radical = too extreme).

Quarreling parties 激辯 (*ji1 bian4* = hotly-debate/argue). One side uses 激將法 (*ji1 jiang4 fa3* = irritate-general-method = tactic of provoking/angering opponent), says 刺激 (*ci4 ji1* = prick-irritate = stirring/provocative) words, makes opponent 激動 (*ji1 dong4* = irritated-roused) and commit blunder.