

Character Builder

您好學？

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 speech-making

陳

Putonghua pronunciation: *chen2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chan4*

Meaning: stale, old, show, display, explain, state

陳 (radical 阝 *er3*, ear) = 陳舊 (*chen2 jiu4* = stale-used/old/passé): 陳酒 (*chen2 jiu3* = mature-wine), 陳腔濫調 (*chen2 qiang1 lan4 diao4* = stale-singing-style-over-used-tune = stale expressions/arguments), 陳跡 (*chen2 ji1* = bygone-traces/spots). Oldies cherish 陳年往事 (*chen2 nian2 wang3 shi4* = old-years-gone-events = the past).

陳 = 陳列 (*chen2 lie4* = show-display), 陳述 (*chen2 shu4* = narration/account-tell). Model 玉體橫陳 (*yü4 ti3 heng2 chen2* = jade/beautiful-body-across-display = lies there showing gorgeous body). Invaders 陳兵邊界 (*chen2 bing1 bian1 jie4* = show/amass-troops/army-along-border).

Radical denounces 陳腐 (*chen2 fu4* = old-rotten) tradition, 力陳其害 (*li4 chen2 qi2 hai4* = forcefully-explain-its-harm = emphasizes its bad/harmful effects), suggests 推陳出新 (*tui1 chen2 chu1 xin1* = replacing-old/stale-things-with-new-things).

by Diana Yue