

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 foreign currencies

值

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jik6*

Meanings: worth, value

值 = 價值 (*jia4 zhi2* = price~worth = value). Antiques are 值錢 (*zhi2 qian2* = worth~money). Rare gem 價值連城 (*jia4 zhi2 lian2 cheng2* = price~worth~row-of~cities = is worth trillions). Romeo thinks dying for love is 值得 (*zhi2 de2* = worth~gain = worth it).

Investors watch 幣值 (*bi4 zhi2* = currencies'~value). Economists predict RMB's 升值 (*sheng1 zhi2* = increase~value = appreciation), US dollar's 貶值 (*bian3 zhi2* = lower~value = depreciation). Accountants calculate company's assets' 總值 (*zhong3 zhi2* = total~value). Market slump hurts stocks' 市值 (*shi4 zhi2* = market~value).

增值稅 (*zeng1 zhi2 shui4* = add~value~tax) = value-added tax (VAT). We work/study hard to 自我增值 (*zi4 wo3 zeng1 zhi2* = self~I~increase~value = enhance our own value/competitiveness).