

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 fox borrow tiger's majesty

威

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wai1*

Meanings: power, prestige, ferocity, authority, majestic air

威 (radical 戈 *ge1*, spear/lance) means martial power/authority. Armored knight looks 威風 (*wei1 feng1* = fierce~wind = fierce/imposing). Strong leader has 威望 (*wei1 wang4* = power~reputation = prestige/authority). Physicist is 權威 (*quan2 wei1* = strong~authority) on A-bomb's 威力 (*wei1 li4* = fierce~power = force).

Angry crowd stages 示威 (*shi4 wei1* = show~strength = demonstration). Criminal gangs 威逼利誘 (*wei1 bi1 li4 you3* = power~force~gain~lure = use force/money) to recruit members. New boss gives subordinates 下馬威 (*xia4 ma3 wei1* = descend~horse~show~power = a clear show of authority).

Encouraged by superpower, small state 狐假虎威 (*hu2 jia3 hu3 wei1* = fox~borrow~tiger's~majesty = flaunts its backer's strength), 耀武揚威 (*yao4 wu3 yang2 wei1* = brandish~weapon~flaunt~power = flexes muscles).

by Diana Yue