

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 ancient fables

Putonghua pronunciation: *xie2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haai4*

Meanings: shoe

鞋 (radical 革 *ge2*, leather) = 鞋子 (*xie2 zi0* = shoe-diminutive): 皮鞋 (*pi2 xie2* = leather-shoes), 布鞋 (*bu4 xie2* = cloth-made-shoes), 拖鞋 (*tuoi1 xie2* = drag-shoes = slippers), 鞋帶 (*xie2 dai4* = shoe-laces).

鞋 (= 履 *lü3*, shoe) must fit 腳 (*jiao3* = 足 *zu2*, foot/feet). Fable 鄭人買履 (*Zheng4 ren2 mai3 lü3* = Zheng-state-person-buy-shoes): In State of Zheng's 市集 (*shi4 ji2* = buy-sell-gathering = market), man wanted to 試鞋 (*shi4 xie2* = try-on-shoes), went home to get his feet's 尺寸 (*chi4 cun4* = feet-inches = length/measurements). When he returned, the market was closed.

Lesson: Stupid men 信度 (*xin4 du4* = trust-measurements/rules), 無自信 (*wu2 zi4 xin4* = no-self-trust = do not trust themselves = have no self-confidence).

by Diana Yue