

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 accidents

責

Putonghua pronunciation: *ze2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jaak3*

Meaning: responsibility, duty, burden, onus, require, reproach, reprimand, punish

責 (丰 *feng1* = growing + 貝 *bei4*, seashell/money, i.e. dividend/loans/requirements) means 職責 (*zhi2 ze2* = post/work-duties), 負責 (*fu4 ze2* = bearing/fulfilling-duties), 責備 (*ze2 bei4* = demand-perfect = scold). Slave-owner 責罵 (*ze2 ma4* = scolds-rebukes), 責罰 (*ze2 fa2* = scolds-punishes) slave.

Wives appreciate husbands' 責任感 (*ze2 ren4 gan3* = duty-mission-heart = sense of responsibility). Officer praises subordinates who 盡責 (*jin4 ze2* = carry-out-all-duties), 譴責 (*qian3 ze2* = condemns-scolds) those who 卸責 (*xie4 ze2* = shrug-off-responsibilities).

In traffic accident trial, prosecutor has 舉證責任 (*ju3 zheng4 ze2 ren4* = offer-proof-responsibility = onus of proof), appoints 專責 (*zhuan1 ze2* = special-duty = specially-designated) investigators. Verdict: Drunken/speeding driver 應負全責 (*ying1 fu4 qian2 ze2* = should-bear-full-responsibility).

by Diana Yue