

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 hungry stomach

Putonghua pronunciation: e4

Cantonese pronunciation: ngoh6

Meaning: hungry, starve, famished, starve someone, yearning for

餓 (radical 食 shi2, eat/food) = 饑餓 (ji1 e4 = famished-hungry). Doctor: 餓嗎? (e4 ma1 = hungry-interrogative) = 餓不餓 (e4 bu4 e4 = hungry-no-hungry) = Are you hungry? Hunger-striker: 很餓! (hen3 e4 = Very-hungry!) 餓壞了! (e4 huai4 le0 = hungry-bad/ruined-ed = I'm badly starved!)

饑民 (ji1 min2 = starving-people = famine victims) 捱餓抵餓 (ai2 ji1 di3 e4 = suffer-hunger-resist-hunger = carry on without food), 饑腸辘辘 (ji1 chang2 lu4 lu4 = famished-intestines-"lu-lu"-grinding-sound = feel bowels grinding), finally 餓死 (e4 si3 = starve-to-death).

餓虎擒羊 (e4 hu3 qin2 yang2 = hungry-tiger-catch-lamb) describes predator overpowering prey, 色中餓鬼 (se1 zhong1 e4 gui3 = color/lust-inside-hungry-ghost) describes horny man insatiably lusting after women.

by Diana Yue