

# Character Builder 您好學嗎?

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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 arithmetics

算

Putonghua pronunciation: *suan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *suen3*

Meaning: calculate, do sums, clear, dismiss, assume, ill-use

算 (radical 竹 *zhu2*, bamboo) = 計算 (*ji4 suan4* = calculation-computation). Chinese invented 算盤 (*suan4 pan2* = calculation-tray = abacus), 珠算 (*zhu1 suan4* = beads-calculation = calculation using abacus). Kids learn 算術 (*suan4 shu2* = calculation-method = doing sums/arithmetics), 心算 (*xin1 suan4* = heart/mental-calculation). 算命 (*suan4 ming4* = project-life/fate) = fortune-telling.

算帳 (*suan4 zhang4* = calculate-accounts) means handle/clear accounts/debts or avenge wrongs. 老謀深算 (*lao3 mou2 shen1 suan4* = old/mature-plot/conspiracy-deep-calculate) describes seasoned schemer. 清算 (*qing1 suan4* = clear-sums) = purge. 暗算 (*an4 suan4* = dark/secretly-harm) = cheat/assassinate.

Without 預算 (*yü4 suan4* = pre-calculate = budget), housewife can't 打算 (*da3 suan4* = hit/make-calculation = plan ahead), says “算了!” (*suan4 le0* = “Forget it!”)

by Diana Yue