

Character Builder

您好嗎? 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 anesthesia

醉

Putonghua pronunciation: *zui4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jui3*

Meaning: drunk, intoxicated, engrossed

醉 (radical 酉 *you3*, liquor/wine + 卒 *zu2*, ultimate/die) means 醉酒 (*zui4 jiu3* = intoxicated-with-wine/liquor): 微醉 (*wei1 zui4* = slightly-drunk/tipsy), 大醉 (*da4 zui4* = big/badly-drunk), 灌醉 (*guan4 zui4* = pour-drunken = lure/coerce someone into getting drunk). Dish 醉雞 (*zui4 ji1* = drunken-chicken) = wine-soaked chicken.

沉醉 (*chen2 zui4* = sink/heavy-drunk) = intoxicated/engrossed. Sommelier 醉心品酒 (*zui4 xin1 pin3 jiu3* = drunk-heart-relish/ assess-wines = loves/wants wine-tasting art/career). 醉鬼 (*zui4 gui3* = drunken-ghost = alcoholic) embraces 醉鄉 (*zui4 xiang1* = drunken-land = state of drunkenness).

麻醉 (*ma2 zui4* = numb-drunk) = anesthesia. Escapist 醉生夢死 (*zui4 sheng1 meng4 si3* = drunken-life-dreaming-death = leads aimless/decadent life), 麻醉自己 (*ma2 zui4 zi4 ji3* = benumb-own-self = makes himself insensitive/forget).

by Diana Yue