

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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:

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 practice

練

Putonghua pronunciation: *lian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lin6*

Meanings: practice, rehearse

練 (radical 系 = 絲 *xi1*, silk) originally means white silk whitened by boiling, hence 練習 (*lian4 xi2* = practice~rehearse or exercises/études). Actors 排練 (*pai2 lian4* = arrange~practice = do rehearsals). Apprentices 苦練 (*ku3 lian4* = bitter~practice = practice hard). Coach 訓練 (*xun4 lian4* = lecture~practice = trains) athletes in 訓練營 (*xun4 lian4 ying2* = lecture~practice~camp = training camp).

Aspiring writer 練筆 (*lian4 bi3* = practice~pen = tries out writing skills). Martial-artists 練功 (*lian4 gong1* = practice~kung-fu). Generals 練兵 (*lian4 bing1* = train~troops/armies).

CEOs are 老練 (*lao3 lian4* = old~practice = experienced/well-practiced), 幹練 (*gan4 lian4* = do~practice = smart/tough/capable). PR veterans 人情練達 (*ren2 qing1 lian4 da2* = people~feelings/rationale~experienced~through = are worldly-wise/suave, can handle people/affairs/situations wisely/ smoothly).

by Diana Yue