

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 storytelling

起

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei2*

Meaning: start, begin

起 (radical 走 *zou3*, walk/leave) = begin/start/rise: 起源 (*qi3 yuan2* = original-source), 起點 (*qi3 dian3* = starting-point), 起錨 (*qi3 mao2* = lift-anchor = start voyage/quest). 說起 (*shuo1 qi3* = say-rise) = mention. 想起 (*xiang3 qi3* = think-rise) = remember. 萬事起頭難 (*wan4 shi4 qi3 tou2 nan2* = ten-thousand-things-start-head-difficult = first step is hardest). 起來 (*qi3 lai2* = arise-get-up)! 起碼 (*qi3 ma3* = starting/lowest-weight = at least) make an attempt!

Story has 起承轉合 (*qi3 cheng2 zhuan3 he2* = beginning-continuation-turning-point-conclusion = structural development): “起初 (*qi3 chu1* = at-first) he was poor; went through 起落 (*qi3 luo4* = ups-and-downs); finally 白手起家 (*bai2 shou3 qi3 jia1* = white/bare-hands-rise-home = established family fortune/status from scratch).”

by Diana Yue