

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 presidential elections

選

Putonghua pronunciation: *xüan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *suen2*

Meanings: choose, select, pick, opt for, elect

選 (radical 辵 chuo4, walk/boat) = 選擇 (*xüan3 ze2* = pick/opt-option-selection). Traditionally, girl's parents 選婿 (*xüan3 xü4* = choose-son-in-law). Students 選讀 (*xüan3 du2* = choose/enroll to read/study) literature, study 詩選 (*shi1 xüan3* = poetry~selections/anthologies). Coach picks 田徑選手 (*tian2 jing4 xüan3 shou3* = field~track~selected~hand = track-and-field racers/athletes).

挑選 (*tiao1 xüan3* = pick~choose) + 舉手 (*jü2 shou3* = raising~hands to approve/endorse) = 選舉 (*xüan3 jü2* = select~raise/elevate = elect/election). 直接選舉 (*zhi2 jie1 xüan3 jü2* = straight~catch~elect~raise) = direct elections.

US presidential election is 間接選舉 (*jian4 jie1 xüan3 jü2* = separated~catch~elect~raise = indirect elections). Voters pick from parties' 候選人 (*hou4 xüan3 ren2* = wait-for~elect-person = candidates): 二選一 (*er4 xüan3 yi1* = out-of-two~pick-one).

by Diana Yue