

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 arithmetics

Putonghua pronunciation: *cheng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing4*

Meaning: ride, multiply by, time (verb), take advantage of

乘 (radical 丿) means ride/multiply by: 乘車 (*cheng2 che1* = ride-car/bus/vehicle), 乘客 (*cheng2 ke4* = ride-guest = passenger), 乘機 (*cheng2 ji1* = ride-airplane) also means take advantage of opportunity. Victor 乘勝追擊 (*cheng2 sheng4 zui1 ji1* = ride-on-victory-pursue-attack = pursues opponent without letting him pause/recuperate).

乘法 (*cheng2 fa3* = multiply-method) = 乘數 (*cheng2 shu4* = multiply-sum) = multiplication. 十乘二 (*shi2 cheng2 er4* = ten-multiply-by-two) equals 二十 (*er4 shi2* = two-ten = twenty), i.e. twenty is 兩倍 (*liang3 bei4* = two-times) of ten.

Kids memorize 乘數表 (*cheng2 shu4 biao3* = multiplication-numbers-table = multiplication table). Naïve stocks-buyer believes his investments will 乘十萬倍 (*cheng2 shi2 wan4 bei4* = multiply-by-ten-ten-thousand-times = grow 100,000 times).

by Diana Yue