

Character Builder 您好學？

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 trains



Putonghua pronunciation: **che1**

Cantonese pronunciation: **che1**

Meaning: car, vehicle, machine

車 (car/machine) is radical for car-related characters: 輪 (**lun2**, wheel), 轉 (**zhuan3**, revolve/turn), 輾 (**zhan3**, run over), 機車 (**ji1 che1** = machine-car) = engine. 上車 (**shang4 che1** = up/mount-car) = get into car. 開車 (**kai1 che1** = open-car) = drive/steer car. 車展 (**che1 zhan3** = car-show) exhibits 轎車 (**jiao4 che1** = sedan-cars), 跑車 (**pao3 che1** = race-cars), 貨車 (**huo4 che1** = goods-vehicles/trucks), 多功能休旅車 (**duo1 gong1 neng2 xiu1 lv3 che1** = many-effect-ability-leisure-travel-car = multi-purpose vehicles = MPVs/minivans).

Shanghai built 磁懸浮 (**ci2 xuan2 fu2** = magnet-suspend-float = magnetic levitation = mag-lev) train, but China's choice is 高速火車 (**gao1 su1 huo3 che1** = high-speed-fire-car = high-speed trains) using 鐵軌 (**tie3 gui3** = iron-rail/tracks).

by Diana Yue