

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

除

Putonghua pronunciation: *chu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chui4*

Meaning: divide, remove, eliminate, not counting, unless

除 (radical 阝 *fu4*, left-ear radical) means remove/unless/divide. Detergent 除蟲 (*chu2 chong2* = removes-bugs). King 免除 (*mian3 chu2* = dismisses-removes) minister's title/duties. Lovers' dialogue: “除非 (*chu2 fei1* = count-not = unless) you swear, I won't believe you.” “I swear there's nobody 除了 (*chu2 le0* = not-counting = except) you.”

除法 (*chu2 fa3* = division-method) = 除數 (*chu2 shu4* = division-sum) = division. 十除二 (*shi2 chu2 er4* = ten-divide-by-two) equals 五 (*wu3*, five), i.e. five is 一半 (*yi1 ban4* = one-half) of ten.

Kids learn arithmetic symbols: 加符 (*jia1 fu2* = addition-sign = +), 減符 (*jian3 fu2* = subtraction-sign = -), 乘符 (*cheng2 fu2* = multiplication-sign = x), 除符 (*chu2 fu2* = division-sign = ÷).

by Diana Yue