

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

軌

Putonghua pronunciation: *gui3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwai2*

Meaning: track, rut, orbit, path, course, rule, rail

軌 (radical 車 *che1*, car) = track/path/rail: planet's 軌道 (*gui3 dao4* = track-path = orbit), cart's 軌跡 (*gui3 zhi1* = tracks-traces/ruts), Trolley-buses 無軌 (*wu2 gui3* = have-no-tracks), 有軌電車 (*you3 gui3 dian4 che1* = has-tracks-electric-car) = tram/streetcar.

鐵路 (*tie3 lu4* = iron-road = railways) have fixed 軌距 (*gui3 ju4* = track-distance = track width), are 單軌 (*dan1 gui3* = single-track) or 雙軌 (*shuang1 gui3* = double-track). Casualties occur when train 出軌 (*chu1 gui3* = leaves-track = derails).

Because of embezzlers' 越軌 (*yue4 gui3* = off/beyond-track = arrogating/unruly/disloyal) behavior, company's finances 脫軌 (*tuō1 gui3* = escape-track = go out of control), need fixing to 納入正軌 (*na4 ru4 zheng4 gui3* = put-into-correct-path = get straightened again).

by Diana Yue