

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 making selections

定

Putonghua pronunciation: *ding4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ding6*

Meaning: decide, determine, establish, stabilize, certain, confirm

定 (宀 *mian2*, universe + 正 *zheng4*, unite) = 固定 (*gu4 ding4* = firmly-fixed), 必定 (*bi4 ding4* = predictable-certain). Scientist 確定 (*que4 ding4* = confirms) 定律 (*ding4 lü4* = universal law). Dictionary gives 定義 (*ding4 yi4* = fixed-definitions). Mystic studies 定數 (*ding4 shu4* = predestined-fate).

Prisoner gets 定罪 (*ding4 zui4* = decision-guilty-verdict). Immigrants find 安定 (*an1 ding4* = peaceful-stable) region, 定居 (*ding4 ju1* = settle-abode). 無定向風 (*wu2 ding4 xiang4 feng1* = no-fixed-direction-winds) describes whimsical person/policies. Attackers 鎖定 (*suo3 ding4* = lock-firm = fix on) targets. 舉棋不定 (*ju3 qi2 bu4 ding4* = hold-chess-piece-not-decided = undecided) side splits. 大局已定 (*da4 ju2 yi3 ding4* = big/overall-game/situation-already-determined = win/lose situation is clear/irreversible).