

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 abusive language

Putonghua pronunciation: *chun3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chun2*

Meaning: stir, stupid, foolish, dumb, dull, clumsy, vulgar

蠢 (春 *chun1*, springtime + two 虫 *chong2*, worm) suggests insects 蠢動 (*chun3 dong4* = clumsy-move = stirring) in springtime. Ambitious invaders/investors 蠢蠢欲動 (*chun3 chun3 yu4 dong4* = clumsy-clumsy-desire-move = feel urge to make moves).

Synonyms 蠢 and 笨 (*ben4*) carry despising/mocking tone: 愚蠢 (*yu2 chun3* = foolish-stupid) person is called 蠢材 (*chun3 cai2* = dumb-material), 笨蛋 (*ben4 dan4* = stupid-egg), 蠢驢 (*chun3 lu2* = stupid-ass), 蠢豬 (*chun3 zhu1* = dumb-pig). 蠢胖 (*chun3 pang1* = stupid-fat) = obese and dumb-looking.

蠢人 (*chun3 ren2* = stupid-guy) 做蠢事 (*zuo4 chun3 shi4* = do-stupid-things = commits follies), 說蠢話 (*shuo1 chun3 hua4* = says-foolish-words/things), then yells: “我真蠢!”