

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 beginning and end

頭

Putonghua pronunciation: *tou2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tau4*

Meaning: head, first, leader

頭 (radical 頁 *ye4*, page) = head: 頭髮 (*tou2 fa3* = head's-hair), 頭痛 (*tou2 teng3* = head-ache), 磕頭 (*kou4 tou4* = bang-head = kow-tow), 寡頭 (*gua3 tou2* = single/widow-head) means oligarch, 萬事起頭難 (*wan4 shi4 qi3 tou2 nan2* = ten-thousand-things/events-start-head-difficult) = Nothing is easy at first. Graduate 從頭做起 (*cong2 tou2 zuo4 qi3* = from-beginning-do-start = starts from nothing), uses 頭腦 (*tou2 nao3* = head-brains), 出人頭地 (*chu1 ren2 tou2 di4* = up-people's-head-ground = distinguishes himself), builds 龍頭 (*long2 tou2* = dragon's-head = leading) enterprise.

Explorer 帶頭 (*dai4 tou2* = takes-lead), crosses 山頭 (*shan1 tou2* = mountain-head = peaks), discovers river's 源頭 (*yuan2 tou2* = source-beginning), makes 頭條 (*tou2 tiao2* = head-lines).

by Diana Yue