

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 growth

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhuang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jong3*

Meanings: strong, grand, bold, strengthen, boost

壯 (另 *pan2*, axe + 士 *shi4*, man) = strong/grand/bold. Farmers raise 肥壯 (*fei2 zhuang4* = fat~strong/healthy) crops/animals. Tourists love 壯麗 (*zhuang4 li4* = grand~beautiful) landscapes, 壯觀 (*zhuang4 guan1* = grand~view = visually astounding) scenes. 壯士 (*zhuang4 shi4* = strong/brave~man/warrior) 壯志凌雲 (*zhuang4 zhi4 ling2 yun2* = brave~aim~soar~clouds = has soaring/lofty spirit/aim).

Athletes have 壯健 (*zhuang4 jian4* = strong~healthy) physique. Men in 壯年 (*zhuang2 nian2* = strong~years = prime) are 強壯 (*qiang2 zhuang4* = sturdy~strong), scoff at foodstuffs/drugs that 壯陽 (*zhuang4 yang2* = strengthen~Yang/male-potency = increase sexual virility).

Ousting oldies, 少壯派 (*shao4 zhuang4 pai4* = young~strong~group = younger faction) 壯膽 (*zhuang4 dan3* = boost~gall-bladder = gets bold), 壯大 (*zhuang4 da4* = strong~big = grows/expands).