

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 trains

拖

Putonghua pronunciation: *tuō1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *toh1*

Meaning: pull, drag, trawl, hang

拖 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means pull/drag: 拖車 (*tuō1 che1* = pull-cart or trailer), 拖船 (*tuō1 chuan2* = tow-boat), 拖網漁船 (*tuō1 wang3 yu2 chuan2* = trawl-net-fishing-boat = trawler), 拖把 (*tuō1 ba3* = drag-handle) = mop. Lovers 手拖手 (*shou3 tuō1 shou3* = hand-drag-hand = go hand-in-hand).

Lazy executives 拖長 (*tuō1 chang2* = drag-long = prolong) project, 拖慢 (*tuō1 man4* = drag-slow = slackens) progress, 拖欠 (*tuō1 qian4* = drag-owe = keeps owing) workers' wages, 拖累 (*tuō1 lei4* = drag-harm = drags down) company.

Train has 機車 (*ji1 che1* = machine-car = locomotive/engine) and 拖卡 (*tuō1 ka3* = drag-"car"-transliterated = coaches/trailers). High-speed trains 拖動 (*tuō1 dong4* = pull-move = drives/speeds up) country's economy.

by Diana Yue