

# 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:

- 1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
- 2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
- 3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
- 4<sup>th</sup> 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 winter past-times



Putonghua pronunciation: *dong1*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *dung1*  
Meaning: winter

冬 (radical 夂 *zhi3*, arrive [ast] = winter: 冬季 (*dong1 ji4* = winter- season), 冬天 (*dong1 tian1* = winter-days), 冬月 (*dong1 yue4* = winter-month) is 11th lunar month. 冬至日 (*dong1 zhi4 ri4* = winter-arrive-day) is winter solstice (21st/22nd/23rd December), 22nd of 24 solar terms in Chinese lunar calendar.

Snakes/bears 冬眠 (*dong1 mian2* = winter-slumber = hibernate). Housewives prepare 冬衣 (*dong1 yi1* = winter-clothes). 冬青樹 (*dong1 qing1 shu4* = winter-green-tree) = holly. Athletes like 冬泳 (*dong1 yong3* = winter-swimming).

Farmers 秋收冬藏 (*qiu1 shou1 dong1 cang2* = in-autumn-gather-harvest-in-winter-store-harvest), enjoy 冬閒 (*dong1 xian2* = winter-leisure-time). Still, they 冬耕 (*dong1 geng1* = winter-plough = dig/plough fields to retain moisture, remove pests/bugs), tend to 冬麥 (*dong1 mai4* = winter-grown-wheat-crop).

by Diana Yue