

Character Builder

您好學？

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mei5*

Meaning: tail, end, trail, extremity, stern

尾 (radical 尸 *shi1*, person/corpse) means 尾巴 (*wei3 ba1* = 尾部 (*wei3 bu4* = tail-part): 馬尾 (*ma3 wei3* = horse/pony-tail), 船尾 (*chuan2 wei3* = ship/boat's-stern), 風尾 (*feng1 wei3* = wind/typhoon's-tail-end). At 月尾 (*yue4 wei3* = month's-end), workmen receive 尾數 (*wei3 shu4* = last/outstanding-sums).

Management 畏首畏尾 (*wei4 shou3 wei4 wei3* = fear-head-fear-tail = acts timidly), project 尾大不掉 (*wei3 da4 bu4 diao4* = tail-big-no-wag/drop = rendered uncontrollable by recalcitrant subordinates). Additional chapters are 狗尾續貂 (*gou3 wei3 xü2 diao1* = dog's-tail-continue-mink = inferior extension) to novel's superb 結尾 (*jie2 wei3* = conclusion-end).

Diva trills 尾音 (*wei3 yin1* = tail-note = closing note/syllable). Aria comes to 尾聲 (*wei3 sheng1* = tail-sound = closing part/coda).

by Diana Yue