

Character Builder

您好嗎? 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 eggs



Putonghua pronunciation: **dan4**

Cantonese pronunciation: **daan6**

Meanings: egg, egg-shaped, O-shaped, oval

Ideogram 蛋 (疋 **shu1**, encircle + 虫 **chong2**, worm) suggested hens encircling eggs they laid. 蛋 = 卵 (**luan3**, egg).

雞蛋 (**ji1 dan4** = chicken-egg) has 蛋黃 (**dan4 huang2** = egg-yellow = egg-yolk), 蛋白 (**dan4 bai2** = egg-white). Cook 打蛋 (**da3 dan4** = beats-eggs), makes 炒蛋 (**chao3 dan4** = stir-fried/scrambled eggs), 蛋糕 (**dan4 gao1** = egg-pudding = cakes).

Egg has facetious/insulting meaning: 壞蛋 (**huai4 dan4** = bad/rotten-egg = rascal/scoundrel), 笨蛋 (**ben4 dan4** = stupid-egg = moron), 傻蛋 (**sha2 dan4** = idiot-egg = idiot), 混蛋 (**hun4 dan4** = muddled-egg = good-for-nothing). 龜蛋 (**gui1 dan4** = tortoise-egg) means bastard. “滾蛋!” (**gun3 dan4** = boil-egg) means “Get out!” 零蛋 (**ling2 dan4** = zero-egg) = 0 score.

by Diana Yue