

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 hiking

遠

Putonghua pronunciation: *yüan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen5*

Meanings: far, distant, remote, distance (verb)

遠 (radical 辵 = 走, *chuo4*, walk far) describes relative distance. 遠處 (*yüan3 chu4* = distant-place) means somewhat far (e.g. gas-station). 遠在天邊 (*yüan3 zai4 tian1 bian1* = far-at-sky's-edge) describes unreachable thing (on the horizon). To Europeans, 遠東 (*yüan3 dong1* = the Far East) is 遠方 (*yüan3 fang1* = faraway-region).

State-leaders having 遠見 (*yüan3 jian4* = far-reaching-sight/vision) develop 遠程導彈 (*yüan3 cheng2 dao3 dan4* = far-journey-guide-bomb = long-range guided missile carrying bomb). 敬而遠之 (*jing4 er2 yüan3 zhi1* = respect-and/but-distance-him/her) describes wary/remote attitude towards suspicious/formidable person.

遠足 (*yüan3 zu2* = far-foot) = hiking. Inexperienced hiker 兜遠路 (*dou1 yüan3 lu4* = wind-far-road = took the longer route), comforts himself: "不遠 (*bu4 yüan3* = not-far!)"

by Diana Yue