

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 military parades

陣

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhen 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jan 6*

Meanings: battle array, battle formation

陣 (containing character 車 *che1* = cart/chariot/car) means chariot/infantry battle formations. Armies 上前線 (*shang4 qian2 xian4* = go-up-to-front-line), command 陣地 (*zhen4 di4* = formation-land = battlefront position). Generals 佈陣 (*bu4 zhen4* = arrange-formation): 方陣 (*fang1 zhen4* = square/rectangular formation), 長蛇陣 (*chang2 she2 zhen4* = long-snake-formation = single-line formation), discretionarily 變陣 (*bian4 zhen4* = change-formation/tactics).

陣營 (*zhen4 ying2* = formation-camps) means battle camps/sides. 陣容強勁 (*zhen4 rong2 qiang2 jing4* = formation-appearance- strong-powerful) describes army/company strength or sports/movie team's all-star cast. Warriors/athletes/executives 上陣 (*shang4 zhen4* = go-up-to-formation = face battle/match/ challenge), perhaps 敗陣 (*bai4 zhen4* = defeated-formation = lose battle/match/deal).

Armistice Day commemorates WWII's 陣亡將士 (*zhen4 wang2 jiang4 shi4* = formation-die-generals-soldiers = soldiers who died in battle).

by Diana Yue