

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 mahjong



Putonghua pronunciation: *zhang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeung1*

Meanings: chapter, rule, order, logic, mahjong tile

章 (立 *li4*, stand + 早 *zao3*, early) means established logic/law. 章法 (*zhang1 fa3* = rules~laws) = logic/organization. 文章 (*wen2 zhang1* = writing~logic) = essay/article. 憲章 (*xian4 zhang1* = constitution~law) = constitution/charter. Company's 章程 (*zhang1 cheng2* = rules~procedures) = articles of association. Allies 約法三章 (*yue4 fa3 san1 zhang1* = agree~rule~three~chapters = sign agreement over issues). 斷章取義 (*duan4 zhang1 qu3 yi4* = cut/break~chapter~take~meaning) means interpreting statement's meaning out of context.

Mahjong-players are 高章 (*gao1 zhang1* = high~logic = good/smart at grasping game's complexities) or 低章 (*di1 zhang1* = low~logic = stupid). Lucky player gets 好章 (*hao3 zhang1* = good~tiles that fit into a good hand), not 壞章 (*huai4 zhang1* = bad~tiles that just don't fit).

by Diana Yue