

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 the Olympic Games

練

Putonghua pronunciation: *lian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lin6*

Meanings: practice, rehearse, drill, experienced, adept

Etymologically, 練 (紼 = 絲 *si1*, silk + 柬 *jian3*, select) meant raw-silk or boiling/scouring/processing of raw-silk. 練 = 練習 (*lian4 xi2* = practice~study/exercise) = skills-practice. Chopin wrote 練習曲 (*lian4 xi2 qu3* = practice~exercise~music.works = études) for piano. Young people need 磨練 (*mo2 lian4* = grind~scour = trials) in life.

Vocalist 練聲 (*lian4 sheng1* = practices~voice). Bruce Lee 練武 (*lian4 wu3* = practice~martial = practices martial arts).

Menaced country 秘密練兵 (*mi4 mi4 lian4 bing1* = secret~covered~practice~army = builds/trains army secretly/covertly).

教練 (*jiao4 lian4* = teach~practice) = trainer/coach. Olympic team 訓練有素 (*xun4 lian4 you3 su4* = lecture~practice~has~always = receives regular/continuous training), but wounded athlete 失練 (*shi1 lian4* = lose~practice = is out of practice).

by Diana Yue