

Character Builder 您好學? 啟

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 kindergartens

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kai2*

Meaning: initiate, start, begin, open, inaugurate, announce, letter, enlighten

啟 (radical 戶 *hu4*, door) means 開啟 (*kai1 qi3* = open/start-open): 啟門 (*qi3 men2* = open-door), 啟封 (*qi3 feng1* = open-sealed-object). Ship 啟碇 (*qi3 ding4* = lifts-anchor), 啟動 (*qi3 dong4* = starts-moves) engine, 啟航 (*qi3 hang2* = begins-sailing/voyage).

Theme-park posts 啟業啟事 (*qi3 ye4 qi3 shi4* = start-operation-announce-event = opening/inauguration announcement), 啟用 (*qi3 yong4* = starts-using) new roller-coasters. Boy loves girl but 羞於啟齒 (*xiu1 yu1 qi3 chi3* = is too shy-to-open-teeth and tell her).

啟蒙 (*qi3 meng2* = open-unconscious/ignorant) = enlightenment. Prophets get 啟示 (*qi3 shi4* = initiated/inspired-manifestations). Kids should get 啟發 (*qi3 fa1* = initiation-start = fresh ideas) from kindergarten's 啟蒙教育 (*qi3 meng2 jiao4 yu4* = initial-teach-breed = initial/rudimentary education).

by Diana Yue