

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 winter past-times



Putonghua pronunciation: **zai3**

Cantonese pronunciation: **joi2**

Meaning: slaughter, butcher, kill, rule, govern

宰 (radical 宀 *mian2*, house + 辛 *xin1*, briars/authority) means butcher/govern. God/ruler 主宰 (*zu3 zai3* = master-rule = governs) people's fate. 宰相 (*zai3 xiang4* = govern-minister) means premiere/prime-minister in feudal China.

Animals are 宰殺 (*zai3 sha1* = slaughtered-killed) in 屠宰場 (*tu2 zai3 chang2* = kill-butcher-area = slaughter-house/abattoir). Powerless employees 任人宰割 (*ren4 ren2 zai3 ge1* = allow-people/others-butcher-carve-up = are at the mercy of boss's exploitation).

Cook 宰雞殺鴨 (*zai3 ji1 sha1 ya1* = slaughters-chicken-kills-duck = prepares banquet with chicken and duck dishes). Muslims 宰羊 (*zai3 yang2* = kill-sheep/lamb) to celebrate 宰牲節 (slaughter-animal-festival = Aid al-Adha = Feast/Festival of the Sacrifice). At year-end villagers 宰豬 (*zai3 zhu1* = butcher-pig) to make 臘肉 (*la4 rou4* = marinated-cured-meat).

by Diana Yue