

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 migrants' home-coming

流

Putonghua pronunciation: *liu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lau4*

Meanings: flow, stream

Noun 流 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = flow/stream: 流水 (*liu2 shui3* = flowing-water), 河流 (*he2 liu2* = river~stream), 海流 (*hai3 liu2* = ocean~current). 上流 (*shang1 liu2* = up~flow) = upper-crust of society, 下流 (*xia4 liu2* = low~flow) describes base/despicable people.

Verb 流 = flow/shed: 流血 (*liu2 xue3* = flow/shed~blood), 流淚 (*liu2 lei4* = flow/shed~tears). Workers 流汗 (*liu2 han4* = shed~sweat, toil). Factory manager oversees 物流 (*wu4 liu2* = materials/things~flow = logistics), 流程 (*liu2 cheng2* = flow~process = flow-chart) of 流水作業 (*liu2 shui3 zuo4 ye4* = flow~water~make~work = assembly lines).

China's 流動人口 (*liu2 dong4 ren2 kou3* = flow~move~people~mouths = population on the move) peaks during New Year, when migrant workers go home.

by Diana Yue