

Character Builder

您好學? 呀

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 horses

Putonghua pronunciation: chí2

Cantonese pronunciation: chí4

Meaning: gallop, ride, speed

馳 (radical 馬 *ma3*, horse) means gallop. Hearing Romans built 馳道 (*chí2 dào4* = riding-roads for horses/carriages/chariots), 馳援 (*chí2 yuán2* = ride-swiftly-to-rescue/relieve) distressed provinces, tourists 神馳 (*shén2 chí2* = imagination-roam). Horse/car/time 飛馳 (*fei1 chí2* = fly-gallop/speed). Ferrari 風馳電掣 (*fēng1 chí2 diàn4 zhì4* = wind-speed-electricity/lightning-charge = races along).

馳名 (*chí2 míng2* = gallop-name) = famous. Knight 馳聘沙場 (*chí2 chéng3 hā1 chāng3* = gallop-roam-sandy-field = charges/fights on battlefields). Businessman 馳聘商場 (*chí2 chéng3 shāng1 chāng3* = gallop-roam-business-field = makes conquests in business circles).

Salary-man 為口奔馳 (*wéi4 kǒu3 bēn1 chí2* = for-mouth/eat-run-gallop = rushes around earning livelihood), feels dreams and reality 背道而馳 (*bèi4 dào4 ér2 chí2* = back/opposite-road-and-gallop = go opposite ways).

by Diana Yue