

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:

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 rejuvenation

增

Putonghua pronunciation: *zeng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jang1*

Meaning: add, increase, rise, grow, gain, extend, strengthen, enhance, multiply

增 (radical 土 *tu3*, earth) means 增加 (*zeng1 jia1* = increase-rise/grow). Factories 增產 (*zeng1 chan3* = increase-production), economy 增長 (*zeng1 zhang3* = expands-grows). 增援 (*zeng1 yuan2* = additional-assistance) = more troops/help deployed. 增值稅 (*zeng1 zhi2 shui4* = add-worth-tax) = value-added tax.

Travelling 增廣見聞 (*zeng1 guang3 jian4 wen2* = add-broaden-see-hear = broadens knowledge/views). Communication 增進 (*zeng1 jin4* = promotes-strengthens) friendship.

Teenagers 增高 (*zeng1 gao1* = grow taller), appetite 大增 (*da4 zeng1* = hugely-increase). Sage advises: 增強 (*zeng1 qiang2* = increase-strengthen) all-round abilities, 為國增光 (*wei4 guo2 zeng1 guang1* = for-country-add-lustre = strive/shine, be our country's pride), otherwise 馬齒徒增 (*ma3 ci3 tu2 zeng1* = horse's-teeth-uselessly-increase = you'll grow old without achieving anything).

by Diana Yue