

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 New York

街

Putonghua pronunciation: *jie1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaai1*

Meaning: street, avenue

街 (radical 行 *xing2*, walk) means 街道 (*jie1 dao4* = street-way = street/avenue). City has 大街小巷 (*da4 jie1 xiao3 xiang4* = big-streets-small-alleys = streets large and small), 林蔭大街 (*lin2 yin4 da4 jie1* = tree-lined/shaded-big-streets = boulevards), 街燈 (*jie1 deng1* = street-lamps) adorn 街區 (*jie1 qu1* = street-enclosed-district).

Housewives 上街 (*shang4 jie1* = up-street = go out), meet 街坊 (*jie1 fang1* = street-square = neighbors) in 街市 (*jie1 shi4* = street-market), pick up 街談巷議 (*jie1 tan2 xiang4 yi4* = street-talk-alley-discussion = street/public gossip).

London's 艦隊街 (*jian4 dui4 jie1* = Fleet-Street) is once home of Britain's national press. Brand-name shops line New York's 第五街 (*di4 wu3 jie1* = number-five-street = Fifth Avenue).

by Diana Yue