

Character Builder 您好學? 好

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 winter past-times

讀

Putonghua pronunciation: *du2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *duk6*

Meaning: read, read aloud, recite, study

讀 (radical 言 *yan2*, speech/words) means 讀書 (*du2 shu1* = read/ study-books): 讀者 (*du2 zhe3* = read-er), 讀本 (*du2 ben3* = reading-text). Judge 宣讀 (*xuan1 du2* = pronounces-reads-out) verdict. Student/defeated politician 閉門讀書 (*bi4 men2 du2 shu1* = shut-doors-read-books = declines invitations, studies/ reflects).

讀博士 (*du2 bo2 shi4* = read/study-broad/wide-read/catholic-scholar) = studying for a Ph.D degree). 讀萬卷書不如行萬里路 (*du2 wan4 juan4 shu1 bu4 ru2 xing2 wan4 li3 lu4* = read-10,000-scr/volume-books-not-comparable-to-travel-10,000-li/miles-roads) means more knowledge is gained by extensive travelling than by extensive reading.

Retirees 讀閒書 (*du2 xian2 shu1* = read-leisure/fun-books). 映雪閒讀 (*ying3 xue3 xian2 du2* = reflect-snow-leisure/fun-read = reading leisurely by the snow's reflected light) is nice winter past-time.