

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 walls

城

(radical 土 tu3 = earth/mud)

Putonghua pronunciation: *cheng 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing 4*

Meanings: wall, walled city, town, city

城 = wall: 萬里長城 (*wan4 li3 chang2 cheng2* = ten-thousand-li/miles-long-wall = the Great Wall of China).

城鎮 (*cheng2 zhen4* = cities~towns) = large/small towns: 城市 (*cheng2 shi4* = town~market = city), 縣城 (*xian4 cheng2* = county~town), 省城 (*sheng3 cheng2* = province~city = provincial capital), 都城 (*du1 cheng2* = capital~city).

城裡人 (*cheng2 li3 ren2* = city~inside~persons) = town-dwellers, 鄉下人 (*xiang1 xia4 ren2* = country~down~persons) = country/village-dwellers. 城鄉差距 (*cheng2 xiang1 cha1 ju4* = town~ country~difference~distance) = urban and rural economies' economic gap. 城市化 (*cheng2 shi4 hua4* = town~city~transform) = urbanization.

四方城 (*si4 fang1 cheng2* = four~side/square~city) means mahjong game. 眾志成城 (*zhong4 zhi4 cheng2 cheng2* = multitude~willpower~becomes~wall) means “United, we stand!”)

by Diana Yue