

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 pine-trees



Putonghua pronunciation: *gan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gon3*

Meanings: trunk

幹 (radical 干 *gan1*, spear/trunk) means main part: 樹幹 (*shu4 gan4* = tree-trunk), person's 軀幹 (*qū1 gan4* = body~trunk), 幹道 (*gan4 dao4* = main~road/highway), 幹線 (*gan4 xian4* = main~railway-line). Verb 幹 means do/work: 幹活 (*gan4 huo2* = do~work), 幹部 (*gan4 bu4* = work~part = cadre/ganbu).

松樹 (*song1 shu4* = pine-trees) are handsome-looking: 樹幹高大 (*shu4 gan4 gao1 da4* = tree~trunk~tall~big = have tall tree-trunks), 枝幹拗曲 (*zhi1 gan4 yao3 qu3* = branches~trunks~gnarled~bent = have gnarled/crooked branches), 不落葉 (*bu4 luo4 ye4* = no~drop/shed~leaves = are evergreen).

松竹梅 (*song1 zhu2 mei2* = pine-tree~bamboo-tree~plum-tree) are praised as 歲寒三友 (*sui4 han2 san1 you3* = year~cold~three~friends = trio of trees thriving in cold bleak winter).