

Character Builder

您好學? 呀

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 eggs

下

Putonghua pronunciation: *xia4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ha6*

Meanings: below, low, under, drop, send

下 (line with something underneath) means low/below/after/downward: 下面 (*xia4 mian4* = down-face = under/below), 下降 (*xia4 jiang4* = downward-fall/descend), 下等 (*xia4 liu2* = low-class). Sky 下雨 (*xia4 yu3* = fall-rain = is raining), traveler 留下 (*liu2 xia4* = remains/stays put). Penitent 下跪 (*xia4 gui4* = down-kneel = kneels), 下淚 (*xia4 lei4* = down-tears = weeps). China's 上山下鄉 (*shang4 shan1 xia4 xiang1* = go-up-hill-go-down-countryside = Down to the Countryside) Movement meant urban youths' massive rural migration. 下崗 (*xia4 gang3* = descend-post) = quit work-post.

Woman 下 (*dan4 xia4* = birth-drop = gives birth to) baby. 母雞下蛋 (*mu3 ji1 xia4 dan4* = mother-chicken-drop-egg) = hen lays egg(s). Angry world watch drones 下彈 (*xia4 dan4* = drop-bombs).

by Diana Yue