

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 hiking

杖

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeung6*

Meanings: stick, pole, cane, staff, club

杖 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) is long-shaped 棍 (*gun4* = stick = stick/pole/staff/club). Serf is 杖責 (*zhang4 ze2* = stick-reprimand = beaten with stick) by master. Criminals fear 杖刑 (*zhang4 xing2* = stick-torture = stick-beating punishment). 擀麵棍 (*gan3 mian4 gun4* = roll/knead-flour/dough-stick = rolling pin) is short, small 木杖 (*mu4 zhang4* = wooden-stick).

Pope/Emperor carries ceremonial 禮杖 (*qian2 zhang4* = power/authority-stick/staff = mace). Shao-lin warrior monk wields 鐵杖 (*tie3 zhang4* = iron-stick). Blind man/beggar feels his way with 竹杖 (*zhu2 zhang4* = bamboo-stick/pole).

English gentleman carries elegant 手杖 (*shou3 zhang4* = hand-stick = walking cane/staff). Cripple needs 拐杖 (*guai3 zhang4* = twisted/limping-stick = walking stick). Hiker uses 行山杖 (*xing2 shan1 zhang4* = walk-hill/mountain-stick = hiking stick).

by Diana Yue