

Character Builder 您好嗎? 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 studying and exams

靜

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jing3*

Meanings: motionless, calm, quiet, soundless

靜 = 靜止 (*jing4 zhi3* = calm~stop = motionless) is opposite of 動 (*dong4*, motion/action). 靜電 (*jing4 dian4* = motionless~electricity) = static. Observers watch market/army's 動靜 (*dong4 jing4* = movement~non-movement = stirrings). Mourners 靜默 (*jing4 mo4* = quiet~silent = remain quiet/silent) at funeral. Protestors stage 靜坐 (*jing4 zuo4* = non-motion~sit = sit-in). Taiji/Tai-chi practitioner 平心靜氣 (*ping2 xin1 jing4 qi4* = level/peace~heart~calm~energy = stays un-agitated/calm), 以靜制動 (*yi3 jing4 zhi4 dong4* = with~non/slow-motion~control-motion = slowly/coolly subdues fast-moving opponent).

Library sign says “肅靜” (*su4 jing4* = reverent/stern~quiet = “Observe silence”), forbids 嘈吵 (*cao2 chao3* = noisy~shout/quarrel = noisy speech), 噪音 (*zao4 yin1* = noisy~sounds). Students 靜靜地 (*jing4 jing4 di0* = quiet~quiet~ly = quietly) study.

by Diana Yue