

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 horses

蹄

Putonghua pronunciation: *ti2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tai4*

Meaning: hoof, hooved leg

蹄 (radical 足 *zu2*, foot) = hooved animal's hoof/leg: 牛蹄 (*niu2 ti2* = cow's-hoof/leg), 羊蹄 (*yang2 ti2* = sheep's-hoof/leg), 口蹄病 (*kou3 ti2 bing4* = pigs'/cows'/foot/hoof-and-mouth-disease). Cooks make stewed 蹄膀 (*ti2 bang3* = hoof-arm = pig's upper-leg/knuckle), 蹄筋 (*ti2 jin1* = cow/pig/sheep's leg's-tendon), 馬蹄 (*ma3 ti2* = horse's-hoof/leg) also means water chestnut. 馬蹄鐵 (*ma3 ti2 tie3* = horse-hoof-iron) = horseshoe. 蹄聲得得 (*ti2 sheng1 de2 de2* = hooves-sound-de-de) = onomatopoeic description of trotting horse's hoof-beat.

馬失前蹄 (*ma3 shi1 qian2 ti2* = horse-lose/slip-front-hoof = horse's front leg slips) describes venture ruined by unexpected fatal error. 鐵蹄下 (*tie3 ti2 xia4* = iron-hooves-under) describes people suffering under cruel invaders, e.g. Chinese during Japanese Invasion (1937-1945).

by Diana Yue