

Character Builder 您好學？

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 fire

炸

Putonghua pronunciation: *zha4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ja3*

Meaning: explode, deep fry

炸 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) = explode. The ancient Chinese invented 炸藥 (*zha4 yao4* = explode-medicine = explosives), 轟炸機 (*hong1 zha4 ji1* = charge/bomb-explode-airplane = bombers) drop 炸彈 (*zha4 dan4* = explode-bullets/pellets = bombs), 炸死 (*zha4 si3* = bomb-dead), 炸傷 (*zha4 shang1* = bomb-injure) civilians, 炸裂 (*zha4 lie4* = bomb-crack) window-glass, 炸毀 (*zha4 hui3* = bomb-destroy) buildings.

炸 also means deep-frying food in hot oil: 炸油條 (*zha4 you2 tiao2* = deep-fry-oil-strip = delicious deep-fried dough), 炸雞 (*zha4 ji1* = deep-fried-chicken). But 氣炸肺 (*qi4 zha4 fei4* = gas/anger-explode-lungs) describes person getting furious.

大爆炸 (*da4 bao4 zha4* = big-burst-explode) = Big Bang Theory. However, 爆炸裝 (*bao4 zha4 zhuang1* = burst-explode-style) means Afro hair-style.

by Diana Yue