

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 rainstorms



Putonghua pronunciation: *yǔ3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue5*

Meaning: rain

雨 = rain: 雨天 (*yǔ3 tian1* = rainy-day), 雨季 (*yǔ3 ji4* = rainy-season), 下雨 (*xia4 yǔ3* = down-rain = rain/raining), 微雨 (*wei1 yǔ3* = small-rain/drizzle), 酸雨 (*suan1 yǔ3* = acid-rain). 暴風雨 (*bao4 feng1 yǔ3* = violent-wind-rain) = rainstorm.

Meteorologists study 雨雲 (*yǔ3 yún2* = rain-clouds), 雨帶 (*yǔ3 dai4* = rain-bands), 降雨量 (*jiang4 yǔ3 liang4* = fall-rain-volume = rainfall amount), 人工降雨 (*ren2 gong1 jiang4 yǔ3* = human-work-fall-rain = rainmaking/cloud-seeding).

Toppling government/marriage experiences 風風雨雨 (*feng1 feng1 yǔ3 yǔ3* = wind-wind-rain-rain = disturbing events/challenges/gossip), Mafia stir up 腥風血雨 (*xing1 feng1 xue3 yǔ3* = fishy/stinking-wind-bloody-rain = violence), 雨過天青 (*yǔ3 guo4 tian1 qing1* = rain-pass-sky-blue) describes tranquility/happiness after storm/trouble/quarrel is over.

by Diana Yue