

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 New York

市

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *si5*

Meaning: city, market

市 means noisy gathering place: 市場 (*shi4 chang3* = market), 市集 (*shi4 ji2* = market-assemble = country market, fair), 城市 (*cheng2 shi4* = wall-town/city = town/city), 市長 (*shi4 zhang3* = town/city-mayor), 市民 (*shi4 min2* = towns-folk, citizens), 市中心 (*shi4 zhong1 xin1* = city-central-heart) = city-centre/downtown.

Shops on strike 罷市 (*ba4 shi4* = stop-doing-business). In quiet 樓市 (*lou2 shi4* = house/property/real-estates-market), commodities 有價無市 (*you3 jia4 wu2 shi4* = has-price-has-no-market = have firm prices but no buyers).

股市 (*gu3 shi* = stock market) fluctuates: 牛市 (*niu2 shi4* = bull's-market), 熊市 (*xiong2 shi4* = bear's-market), 升市 (*sheng1 shi4* = rising-market), 跌市 (*die4 shi4* = falling-market). 收市 (*shou4 shi4* = withdraw-market) = market closes.

by Diana Yue