

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 change of weather

抖

Putonghua pronunciation: *dou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dau2*

Meaning: tremble, shiver, quiver, shake, rouse, jerk, jog, enliven, rouse, vibrate

抖 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means 顫抖 (*zhan4 dou3* = tremble/vibrate-shake/quiver). In temperature-drop, chilly gusts 抖動 (*dou3 dong4* = shake-move/sway) branches, 抖落 (*dou3 luo4* = shake-off) leaves, birds 抖鬆 (*dou3 song1* = fluff-loose/up) feathers, housewives 抖出 (*dou3 chu1* = fumble/heave/turn-out) warm bedding. Investigation 抖出 (*dou3 chu1* = shake-out = exposes) misconduct/corruption.

Rider 一抖馬韁 (*yi1 dou3 ma3 jiang1* = gives one-jog-to-horse's -reins), horse shoots off. Athlete looks 精神抖擻 (*jing1 shen2 dou3 sou3* = essence-spirit-rouse-stir = spritely/energetic). Doctor encourages 發抖 (*fa1 dou3* = emit-shiver = shivering) fever-patient: 抖起精神! (*dou3 qi3 jing1 shen2* = Brace-up-your-spirit!) Cantonese 抖 (pronounced "*tau2*") means pause/rest. 早抖 (*jo2 tau2* = early-rest) means "Good-night!" or, slangily/dismissively, "Get lost!"

by Diana Yue