

Character Builder 您好嗎? 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 studying and exams

科

Putonghua pronunciation: *ke1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foh1*

Meanings: subject, division

In feudal China, students attended 科舉 (*ke1 ju3* = subject-raise/recommend = state-run examinations). 秀才 (*xiu4 cai2* = sprouting~talent) = village-exam qualifiers. 舉人 (*ju3 ren2* = erected-person) = city-exam qualifiers. Imperial capital exams selected 進士 (*jin4 shi4* = progress~scholar), would-be bureau-crats, 狀元 (*zhuang4 yuan2* = edict~supreme = year's top scholar).

科目 (*ke1 mu4* = subject~division) = scientific/curriculum divisions: 貓科 (*mao1 ke1* = cat~division = felines), 地理科 (*di4 li3 ke1* = earth~reason~subject = geography).

University freshmen 選科 (*xuan3 ke1* = choose/elect~subjects): 文科 (*wen2 ke1* = literary~subjects = humanities), 理科 (*li3 ke1* = reason~subjects = sciences), 工科 (*gong1 ke1* = work/engineer~subjects = engineering), 醫科 (*yi1 ke1* = doctor~subject = medicine), 專科 (*zhuang1 ke1* = concentrate~subject = specializations).

by Diana Yue