

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 old people

倒

Putonghua pronunciation: *dao3, dao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *do2*

Meanings: collapse, fall, topple, reverse, overturn, pour

倒 (radical 亻 = 人 *ren2*, person) = 倒下 (*dao3 xia4* = fall-down), 倒轉 (*dao3 zhuan4* = reverse-turn-around). Hit pedestrian 倒地 (*dao3 di4* = falls-to-ground). Failed company 倒閉 (*dao3 bi4* = collapses-closes).

Dictator 倒行逆施 (*dao4 xing2 ni4 shi1* = reverse-act-opposite-administer = offends/violates popular will/preferences) but remains 不倒翁 (*bu4 dao3 weng1* = no-fall-old-man = wobbly doll), can't be 推倒 (*tui1 dao3* = pushed-over), 打倒 (*da3 dao3* = hit/beaten-down = toppled from power).

Oldie 倒霉 (*dao3 mei2* = fall/pour-mildew/mould = is unlucky), 跌倒 (*die1 dao3* = slips-and-falls), 病倒 (*bing4 dao3* = ill-fall = falls ill), memory 倒退 (*dao4 tui4* = reverse-retreat = deteriorates), begins 倒數 (*dao4 shu3* = reverse-count = count down) of remaining years.

by Diana Yue