

Character Builder

您好學？

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

盆

Putonghua pronunciation: *pen2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *poon4*

Meaning: basin, dish, pot, tub, bowl

盆's two parts (分 *fen1*, divide + 皿 *min3*, vessel/container) indicates big container for sub-divisible contents: 臉盆 (*lian3 pen2* = face-basin = basin for washing face/hands), 澡盆 (*zao3 pen2* = bath-tub), 傾盆大雨 (*qing1 pen2 da4 yu3* = pour-basin-big-rain) = pouring/heavy rain.

盆栽 (*pen2 zai1* = potted-plants) need 花盆 (*hua1 pen2* = flower-pots), Chinese 盆景 (*pen2 jing3* = miniature potted-landscape) = Japanese bonsai, 盆地 (*pen2 di4* = basin-land) = basin, e.g. Tarim Basin.

Cantonese villages serve 盆菜 (*pen1 cai4* = Cantonese “*poon4 choi3*”, aka Big Bowl Feast = big multi-ingredients pot), Cantonese expression 盆滿鉢滿 (*pen2 man3 bo1 man3* = Cantonese “*poon4 moon5 boot3 moon5*” = basin-full-bowl-full) describes businessman up to the neck with profits/savings.

by Diana Yue