

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 acting



Putonghua pronunciation: *xi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meanings: frivolity, play, drama, acting

戲 = play/frivolity. 遊戲 (*you2 xi4* = roam-play = game), 戲言 (*xi4 yan2* = play/frivolous-words = joke), 戲法 (*xi4 fa3* = play-methods = magic tricks). Kids 戲弄 (*xi4 nong4* = play-meddle-with = fool) teacher.

Chinese 戲劇 (*xi4 ju2* = play-drama = drama) is 戲曲 (*xi4 qu3* = drama-songs). 戲子 (*xi4 zi3* = play-person = actor/actress) 做戲 (*zuo4 xi4* = make-drama = act), 唱戲 (*chang4 xi4* = sing-drama = perform in operas).

Chinese saying “人生如戲” (*ren2 sheng1 ru2 xi4* = people’s-life-resemble-drama = life resembles drama) echoes 莎士比亞 (*sha1 shi4 bi3 ya4* = “Shakespeare”-transliterated)’s line “All the world’s a stage” (= 世界像戲台 *shi4 jie4 xiang4 wu3 tai2* = world-territory-resemble-dance-stage).