

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 baths and showers

淨

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeng6*

Meanings: clean, pure, purify, net

淨 (radical 冫 = 水 *shui3*, water) describes physical/spiritual cleanliness/purity: 洗淨 (*xi3 jing4* = wash~clean), 抹淨 (*mo4 jing4* = wipe~clean/away), 淨水 (*jing4 shui3* = pure~water), 窗明几淨 (*chuang1 ming2 ji1 jing4* = window~clear~small-table~clean) describes clean, well-lit room. 素淨 (*su4 jing4* = unadorned~clean) describes quiet/tranquil/understated colors/decor.

Businesses are taxed on 淨利 (*jing4 li4* = pure/net~profits). Gambler 輸得一乾二淨 (*shu1 de0 yi1 gan1 er4 jing4* = lose~result~one~dry~two~clean = loses last penny). 眼不見為淨 (*yan3 bu4 jian4 wei2 jing4* = eyes~no~see~is~clean) means self-deceptively ignoring faults/injustices.

Bathing makes body 乾淨 (*gan1 jing4* = dry~clean = clean). Meditation 淨化 (*jing4 hua4* = clean~transform = purifies) the soul. However, 淨身 (*jing4 shen1* = clean~body) means eunuch's castration.

by Diana Yue