

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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

Putonghua pronunciation: *jin4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jam3*

Meaning: dip,, immerse, submerge, soak, steep, infuse, moisten, flood, baptize

浸 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = immerse in water/liquid: 浸濕 (*jin4 shi1* = soak-wet), 浸浴 (*jin4 yu4* = soak-bath), 浸劑 (*jin4 ji4* = steep-dose = infusion), 浸醃 (*jin4 yan1* = soak-marinate) pickles, 浸透 (*jin4 tou4* = soak-thoroughly) abalone/shark's fin before stewing.

Convert takes 浸禮 (*jin4 li3* = baptism ceremony), 受浸 (*shou4 jin4* = is baptized), joins 浸信會 (*jin4 xin4 hui4* = baptize-believe-sect/order = Baptist church).

Rain 浸潤 (*jin4 run4* = steep-moisten/enrich = nourishes) vegetation. Well-known Cantonese nursery rhyme begins with “落大雨, 水浸街” (*luo4 da4 yu3, shui3 jin4 jie1* = Cantonese “*lok6 daai6 yue5, sui2 jam3 gaai1* = fall-big-rain, water-drown-street = Heavy rain is falling, the streets are flooded.”).

by Diana Yue