

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 longevity

延

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yin1*

Meaning: continue, retain, stretch, extend, prolong, postpone, delay

延 (radical 廴 *yan2*, go) means continue/extend. Forests 綿延 (*mian2 yan2* = connect-continue = stretch) for miles. Drought-period 延長 (*yan2 chang2* = is extended-prolonged). Forest-fires 蔓延 (*man4 yan2* = tendril-extend = spread), threatening wildlife's 延續 (*yan2 xu2* = regeneration-continued-existence). Filibusters 拖延 (*tuoi yan2* = drag-on-prolong) discussions. Unfinished meeting 順延 (*shun4 yan2* = smooth-postpone = by agenda, will continue) next week. Budget approvals 延期 (*yan2 qi1* = extend-period = are delayed). Malpractice 延伸 (*yan2 shen1* = is extended-proliferated), 禍延後代 (*huo4 yan2 hou4 dai4* = calamities-extend-later-generation = affects the future negatively).

Exercising can 延遲 (*yan2 chi2* = prolong-late = delay) ageing, 益壽延年 (*yi1 shou4 yan2 nan2* = benefit-longevity-extend-years/age = make you live better and longer).

by Diana Yue