

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 Hong Kong food

點

Putonghua pronunciation: *dian 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dim 2*

Meanings: point, touch, dot, drop, snack, dim-sum

Verb 點 means point/touch: 點名 (*dian3 ming2* = point-name = roll-call/nominate), 點頭 (*dian3 tou2* = dot-head) = nod/approve.

Noun 點 means drop/wee bit: 雨點 (*yu2 dian3* = rain~drops), “有點冷” (*you2 dian2 leng3* = has~a-bit-cold) = “It’s a bit cold”. Weak patients 打點滴 (*da2 dian3 di1* = hit/mount-dot-drop = get intravenous drip).

點心 (*dian3 xin1* = bit-of~heart) = small delicacies/dim-sum. We 上茶樓 (*shang4 cha2 lou2* = mount/go-to~tea-house) for 一盅兩件 (*yi1 zhong1 liang3 jian4* = one~bowl~two~pieces = bowl of tea, some dim-sum): 蝦餃 (*xia1 jiao3* = Cantonese ha1 gaau2 = shrimp~dumplings), 春卷 (*chun1 juan4* = Cantonese chun1 guen3 = spring-rolls), 鳳爪 (*feng4 zhao3* = Cantonese fung6 jaau2 = phoenix-claws = stewed chicken feet).

by Diana Yue