

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: *tai2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *toi4*

Meanings: platform, stage, terrace

台 = raised flat structure: 陽台 (*yang2 tai2* = sun~platform = verandah), 平台 (*ping2 tai2* = flat~stage = platform), 講台 (*jiang3 tai2* = talk/lecturing~stage). 亭台樓閣 (*ting2 tai2 lou2 ge2* = pavilions~terraces~storeyed-buildings~attics) collectively means Chinese architecture. 月台 (*yue4 tai3* = moon~stage) = railway platform. 斷頭台 (*duan4 tou2 tai2* = break~head~stage) = execution/guillotine~platform. 電視台 (*dian4 shi4 tai2* = electric~vision~stage) = television station/channel. 舞台 (*wu3 tai2* = dance~stage) = 戲台 (*xi4 tai2* = drama~stage) = performing stage. Actors 上台 (*shang4 tai2* = ascend~stage), perform 話劇 (*hua4 ju2* = speech~drama = plays), deliver 台詞 (*tai2 ci2* = stage~words = dialogues).

下台 (*xia4 tai2* = descend~stage) describes performer leaving stage or politician stepping down.

by Diana Yue