

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:

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 climate change

氣

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meaning: breath, gas, air, energy, qi

氣 (radical 气 *qi4*, gas) = gas/air. 空氣 (*kong1 qi4* = empty-gas = air) contains 氣體 (*qi4 ti3* = gas-body = gases): 氧氣 (*yang3 qi4* = oxygen-gas), 氫氣 (*qing1 qi4* = hydrogen-gas). 大氣層 (*da4 qi4 ceng2* = big-gas/air-layer) = atmosphere.

天氣 (*tian1 qi4* = sky-air) = weather. When 天朗氣清 (*tian1 lang3 qi4 qing1* = sky-sunny-air-clean/pure = weather is fine), grass/flowers emit 香氣 (*xiang1 qi4* = aromatic-smell). 氯氣 (*lü4 qi4* = chlorine-gas) compounds deplete 臭氧層 (*chou4 yang3 ceng2* = stinking-oxygen-layer = ozone-layer), causing 氣候變化 (*qi4 hou4 bian4 hua4* = air/weather-season-change-transform = climate change).

Taoism studies 氣 (*qi*, energy-flow). 氣功 (*qi4 gong1* = breathing/energy-exercises = qi-gong) practitioners 運氣 (*yün4 qi4* = summons/moves-internal-energy).

by Diana Yue