

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 Hurricane Sandy



Putonghua pronunciation: *feng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fung1*

Meanings: breeze, wind, gale, style, trend, force

風 = wind/gale: 輕風 (*qing1 feng1* = light~breeze), 強風 (*qiang2 feng1* = strong~wind), 烈風 (*lie4 feng1* = powerful~gale). 旋風 (*xuan2 feng1* = whirl~wind/cyclones), 龍捲風 (*long2 juan3 feng1* = dragon~roll~wind = tornados) wreak havoc. 薰風 (*xun1 feng1* = smoke~wind) = balmy breezes.

Chinese use 風水 (*feng1 shui3* = wind~water = geomancy) concepts to predict/improve fortune. Farmers/travelers pray for 順風順水 (*shun4 feng1 shun4 shui3* = smooth-running~wind~smooth-running~water = smooth-going year/conditions) without 風險 (*feng1 xian3* = wind~danger = risks).

風暴 (*feng1 bao4* = wind~violent) = storm. 颶風 (*ju4 feng1*), sharing pronunciation and meaning with 巨風 (*ju4 feng1* = giant~wind), means hurricane/typhoon. New York bore brunt of 颶風桑迪 (*ju4 feng1 Sang1 Di2* = Hurricane~"Sandy"-transliterated) in 2012.

by Diana Yue