

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 group tours

點

Putonghua pronunciation: *dian3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dim2*

Meaning: point, dot, spot, droplet, touch, count, decorate, ignite, select, snack

點 (radical 灬 = 火 *huo3*, fire) as verb means 點頭 (*dian3 tou2* = dot-head = nod/approve), 點數 (*dian3 shu4* = count-numbers), 點名 (*dian3 ming2* = point-name = roll-call/nominate), 點火 (*dian3 huo3* = ignite-fire), 點化 (*dian3 hua4* = touch-transform = enlighten).

Noun 點 means drop/point/jot/iota: 起點 (*qi3 dian3* = starting-point), 賣點 (*mai4 dian3* = selling-point), 冰點 (*bing1 dian3* = ice/freezing-point), 點滴 (*dian3 di1* = dot-drop) means small bits or intravenous drip.

Harbor 點綴 (*dian3 zhui4* = dotted-attached = dotted/decorated) with sails is 旅遊點 (*lü3 you2 dian3* = travel-leisurely-roam-point = tourist spot), 雨點 (*yü3 dian3* = rain-drops) fall, tourists 有點冷 (*you3 dian2 leng3* = are/feel-a-bit-cold), eat 點心 (*dian3 xin1* = bit-of-heart = small delicacies/dim-sum).

by Diana Yue