

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 barbecues



Putonghua pronunciation: *chuan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chuen3*

Meanings: string, strand, connect, kebab

Pictogram 串 means string/strand/connect: 一串錢 (*yī chuan4 qian2* = one-string-of-coins), 花串 (*hua1 chuan4* = flower-strand/wreath), 一串珠 (*yī chuan4 zhu1* = a-strand-of-beads/pearls). Highway accident causes 一連串 (*yī lian2 chuan4* = a-string-of) car-crashes. Housewives 串門子 (*chuan4 men2 zi0* = connect-doors-diminutive = paying house visits) to pick up gossip.

Star 串演 (*chuan4 yan3* = leads-acts) drama parts, sometimes 客串 (*ke4 chuan4* = guest-act = plays guest roles). Generals 串謀 (*chuan4 mou2* = together-conspire) to topple Fuhrer. In China's Cultural Revolution, Red Guards travel around country to 大串連 (*da4 chuan4 lian2* = big-string-connect = join other Red Guards).

Barbecues serve 烤肉串 (*kao3 rou4 chuan4* = grilled-meat-strings = kebabs), e.g. 羊肉串 (*yang2 rou4 chuan4* = lamb-kebabs).

by Diana Yue