

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 fever

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yim4*

Meaning: hot, blazing, burning, fever, feverish, inflammation

炎 (two 火 *huo3*, fire, suggesting rising flames) describes 炎熱 (*yan2 ri4* = blazing/very-hot) weather/climate: 炎夏 (*yan2 xia4* = hot-summer), 夏日炎炎 (*xia4 ri4 yan2 yan2* = summer-days-burn-burn = "Summer days are so hot!") 炎黃子孫 (*yan2 huang2 zi3 sun1* = Yan-Emperor's-Huang-Emperor's-sons-grandsons) means all Chinese people.

Lackeys 趨炎附勢 (*cui1 yan2 fu4 shi4* = go-to-hot-attach-to-force = flock to please those in power). Bankrupt person feels 世態炎涼 (*shi4 tai4 yan2 liang2* = world's-attitudes-hot-cold = people once nice/warm to me have turned cold = it's a snobbish world).

Wounds can 發炎 (*fa1 yan2* = develop-hot = get inflamed). Doctor treats 炎症 (*yan2 zheng4* = hot-disease = inflammation) with 消炎藥 (*xiao1 yan2 yao4* = anti-inflammatory drugs).

by Diana Yue