

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 history

評

Putonghua pronunciation: *ping2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ping4*

Meanings: comment, criticize, assess

評 has radical 言 (*yan2*, words). 評論 (*ping2 lun4* = criticize~comment) = critique: 樂評 (*yue4 ping2* = music~criticism), 政論 (*zheng4 lun4* = political~commentary). Teachers/adjudicators 評分 (*ping2 fen1* = assess/give~marks). Economists 評估 (*ping2 gu3* = critically-assess~evaluate) effects of austerity measures.

Outrageous behavior invites 批評 (*pi1 ping2* = condemn~criticize = criticism). Political dissident gets 批判 (*pi1 pan4* = condemn~judge/ruling = condemnation). Oscar-winning film gets 好評 (*hao3 ping2* = good~reviews). Dressy woman gets 評頭品足 (*ping2 tou2 pin3 zu2* = comment-head-assess/classify-legs = finger-pointing).

Historian writes 史評 (*shi3 ping2* = historical~critique), gives 評價 (*ping2 jia4* = critically-assess~value = evaluation): Mao Zedong 功過七三開 (*gong1 guo4 qi1 san1 kai1* = achievements~ faults~ seven~three~split = did more good than harm).

by Diana Yue