

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 cycling

踏

Putonghua pronunciation: *ta4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *daap6*

Meanings: step, tread

踏 (radical 足 *zu2*, foot) = step/tread: 踏板 (*ta4 ban3* = treading-plank), 踐踏 (*qian2 ta4* = trample~tread), 踏雪 (*ta4 xue3* = treading/walking-on~snow). Explorer 踏足 (*ta4 zu2* = tread~foot = sets foot on) virgin island. 踏入中年 (*ta4 ru4 zhong1 nian2* = step~into~middle-year) = entering middle-age.

腳踏實地 (*jiao3 ta4 shi2 di4* = feet~step-on~solid~ground) = 踏實 (*ta4 shi2* = step-on~solid) describes hardworking/no-fancy person. 原地踏步 (*yuan2 di4 ta4 bu4* = original~ground~tread~steps) describes plans going nowhere. 一腳踏兩船 (*yi1 jiao3 ta4 liang3 chuan2* = one~foot~tread~two~ boats) means dividing loyalty between two camps.

腳踏車 (*jiao3 ta4 che1* = feet~tread~cart/car), 自行車 (*zi4 xing2 che1* = self~walk/move~cart/car), 單車 (*dan1 che1* = single~cart/car) all mean bicycle/bike.

by Diana Yue