

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 housing

Putonghua pronunciation: *fang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fong4*

Meanings: house, room, branch of family clan

房 (radical 戶 *hu4*, door-panel) = 房子 (*fang2 zi0* = house-diminutive) = 房屋 (*fang2 wu1* = house-house) = houses: 平房 (*ping2 fang2* = level/low-rise-houses), 民房 (*min2 fang2* = civilians' houses), 屠房 (*tu2 fang2* = slaughter-house).

房間 (*fang2 jian1* = house-partition) = room: 睡房 (*shui4 fang2* = sleeping/bed-room), 廚房 (*chu2 fang2* = kitchen-room). 新房 (*xin1 fang2* = new/bridal-chamber) is where newly-weds 洞房 (*dong4 fang2* = hole-room = spend wedding night). Polygamous man has 長房 (*zhang3 fang2* = first-room = number-one wife-and-offsprings) and concubines.

房地產 (*fang2 di4 chan3* = house-land-property) = real estate. Government modifies 房屋政策 (*fang2 wu1 zheng4 ce4* = houses-administration-strategy = housing policy) to tackle 房荒 (*fang2 huang1* = houses-famine = housing shortage).

by Diana Yue