

Character Builder

您好嗎? 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 IDs



Putonghua pronunciation: *ben3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *boon2*

Meanings: original, book, copy

本 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood/tree + horizontal stroke at base) means roots/basic/essential/original, opposite of 末 (*mo4*, tip/end/inessential). 根本 (gen4 ben3 = roots-basic) = 基本 (*ji1 ben3* = foundation-basic) = fundamental/fundamentally. 我本人 (*wo3 ben3 ren2* = I/original-person) = 我本身 (*wo3 ben3 shen1* = I-original-body) have reflexive/emphatic meaning: myself.

書本 (*shu1 ben3* = book-original) means book/script(s): 課本 (*ke4 ben3* = lesson/text-book), 劇本 (*ju2 ben3* = drama/film-script), 好書 (*hao3 shu1* = good-book). 本 is also quantifier for book/copy: 一本日記 (*yi1 ben3 ri4 ji4* = one-book-daily-record = a diary), 十本聖經 (*shi2 ben3 sheng4 jing1* = ten-copy-holy-scriptures = ten Bibles).

Person having dual nationality holds 兩本護照 (*liang3 ben3 hu4 zhao4* = two-book-protection-proof-document = two passports).

by Diana Yue