

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 heat waves

降

Putonghua pronunciation: *jiang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gong3*

Meanings: lower, fall, descend

降 = fall/descend. 降雨 (*jiang4 yu3* = fall~rain = coming of rain), 降溫 (*jiang4 wen1* = fall~warmth = temperature-drop) end heat-wave. 降雪 (*jiang4 xue3* = fall~snow) = snowfall. Airplanes 降落 (*jiang4 luo4* = descend~fall = land). 降落傘 (*jiang4 luo4 san3* = descend~fall~umbrella) = parachute.

降 and 升 (*sheng1*, rise) are opposites. Businessmen 降低 (*jiang4 di1* = lower~low = bring down) expenses to 提升 (*ti2 sheng1* = raise~high = raise) company's gains. Multi-storey buildings have 升降機 (*sheng1 jiang4 ji1* = rise~fall~machines = 電梯 *dian4 ti1* = electric~ladders = lifts/escalators).

從天而降 (*cong2 tian1 er2 jiang4* = from~sky~and~descend) describes person/event's unexpected coming. Everybody loves 天降橫財 (*tian1 jiang4 heng2 cai2* = sky~fall~horizontal~wealth = a Heaven-sent windfall)!

by Diana Yue