

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 lovely sky

星

Putonghua pronunciation: *xing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing1*

Meanings: star

星 has radical 日 (*ri4*, sun). 恆星 (*heng2 xing1* = eternal~star = suns/stars), 行星 (*xing2 xing1* = wandering~star = planets) populate 星空 (*xing1 kong1* = starry~sky). 星際旅行 (*xing1 ji4 lü3 xing2* = stars~among~travel~walk) = interstellar travel. 星球大戰 (*xing1 qiu2 da4 zhan4* = star~sphere~big~war) = star wars. 眾星拱月 (*zhong4 xing1 gong3 yue4* = many~stars~prop-up~moon) describes attentively escorted person. 掃帚星 (*sao4 zhou3 xing1* = sweep~broom~star) means comet or person bringing bad luck.

“星垂平野闊” (*xing1 shui2 ping2 ye3 kuo4* = star~hangs-over~flat~wilderness~wide), “月湧大江流” (*yue4 yong3 da4 jiang1 liu2* = moon~gushes-out~big~river~flows) are famous lines describing evening landscape: “Star hanging over open plain; moon bursting upon mighty river’s flow.”

by Diana Yue