

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

建

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gin3*

Meanings: build, construct, erect, raise, establish

建 (建 *yan3*, extend + 聿 *lü4*, law) = 建立 (*jian4 li4* = erect~establish). Forefathers 建國 (*jian4 guo2* = founded-nation), 建軍 (*jian4 jun1* = built~army). Generals 建功 (*jian4 gong1* = achieved~distinguished-feats). Post-war nation underwent 重建 (*chong2 jian4* = again~build = reconstruction).

Government builds 基礎建設 (*ji1 chu3 jian4 she4* = basic~foundation~build~establish = infrastructures), hires 建築師 (*jian4 zhu1 shi1* = build~construct~masters = architects), engineers, 乘建商 (*cheng2 jian4 shang1* = accept~construct~businessman/firm = building contractors), purchases 建材 (*jian4 cai2* = building~materials), 建造 (*jian4 zao4* = build~construct) low-cost estates.

Critics 建議 (*jian4 yi4* = raise~discussion = propose): 改建 (*gai3 jian4* = change/re~build) old estates, outlaw 僭建物 (*jian4 jian4 wu4* = wrongful/usurp~built~object = illegal structures).