

Character Builder

您好學？

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 love

深

Putonghua pronunciation: *shen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sam1*

Meaning: deep, profound, dark

深 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) means deep/dark: 深海 (*shen1 hai3* = deep-sea), 深色 (*shen1 se1* = dark-color), 深山 (*shen1 shan1* = deep-mountains), 深夜 (*shen1 ye4* = deep/late-night), 深處 (*shen1 chu4* = deep-place) = place/heart's depth/interior. Diver enters 深水 (*shen1 shui3* = deep-water region), estimates 深淺 (*shen1 qian3* = deep-shallow = depth).

Parents 深愛 (*shen1 ai4* = deeply-love) son/daughter. Lover 情深似海 (*qing2 shen1 si4 hai3* = amour-deep-resemble-sea = deeply/dearly loves his sweetheart).

深沉 (*shen1 chen2* = deep-sink) describes un-showy person with deep thinking or secretive mind. Scholars 深入探討 (*shen1 ru4 tan4 tao3* = deep-enter-probe-see = study in-depth) ancient Persia's 深厚文化 (*shen1 hou4 wen2 hua4* = deep-thick-writing-transformation = rich civilization/cultural tradition).

by Diana Yue