

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 Chinese painting

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Putonghua pronunciation: *ti 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tai 4*

Meanings: title, subject, theme, inscribe, inscription

Paintings have 題材 (*ti2 cai2* = subject-matter), 題目 (*ti2 mu4* = title~eye = title), e.g. Picasso's Guernica, 張擇端 (*Zhang1 Ze2 duan1*)'s 清明上河圖 (*Qing1 Ming2 shang4 he2 tu2* = Qing~Ming-Festival~up~river~picture = Going up the river during Qingming Festival).

Artist completes painting, 題字 (*ti2 zi4* = title/inscribe~words = writes short prose/poem) in the empty space to 點題 (*dian3 ti2* = point-out/reveal-theme), 抒懷 (*shu1 huai2* = open~bosom = express thoughts/feelings), puts signature and red 印章 (*yin4 zhang1* = print~seal = personal seal) at the end.

Great Chinese painters master art of 詩 (*shi1* = poetry), 書 (*shu1* = calligraphy), 畫 (*hua4* = painting), 刻印 (*ke1 yin4* = carve~seals = carving name/phrase/sentence in ancient writing script on small stone/jade seals).

by Diana Yue