

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 insects

Putonghua pronunciation: *chong 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chung 4*

Meanings: insect, worm, bug

虫 (蟲's simplified form) as character's radical may indicate insect (蚤 *zao1*, flea), reptile (蛇 *she2*, snake), mammal (蝙蝠 *bian1 fu2*, bat). Colloquially, 大蟲 (*da4 chong2* = big-worm) means tiger.

昆蟲 (*kun1 chong2* = insect)'s 卵 (*luan3* = egg) hatches into 幼蟲 (*you4 chong2* = young~insect-larva/caterpillar), becomes 蟲蛹 (*chong2 yong3* = insect-pupa), 蛻變 (*tui4 bian4* = molt-change = metamorphoses) into 成蟲 (*cheng2 chong3* = adult).

殺蟲劑 (*sha1 chibg2 ji1* = kill-insects-potion = insecticides/pesticides) kill 害蟲 (*hai4 chong2* = harmful~insects/pests). 百足之蟲, 死而不僵 (*bai2 zhu1 zhi1 chong2, si3 er2 bu2 jiang1* = hundred-legs~'s~worm, dies-but-not~stiff) warns that powerful enemies/entities hit by killing blows may still have lingering breath/strength (to rebound).