

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 right and wrong

錯

Putonghua pronunciation: *cuo4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *choh3*

Meanings: wrong

錯 = 錯誤 (*cuo4 wu4* = wrong/error~mistake/delay): 錯覺 (*cuo4 jue2* = mistaken~feeling = false impression), 錯亂 (*cuo4 luan4* = wrong~disorganized = deranged), 對錯 (*dui4 cuo4* = right-or-wrong intellectual/moral judgment). Late-comer 錯過 (*cuo4 guo4* = wrong~pass = misses) the show.

做錯事 (*zuo4 cuo4 shi4* = do~wrong~act/event) = did something wrong. 殺錯人 (*sha1 cuo4 ren1* = kill~wrong~person) = killed the wrong guy. To 認錯 (*ren4 cuo4* = confess/admit~mistake = apologize), we say “我錯了!” (*wo3 cuo4 le0* = I-err~ed) = “I was wrong!”

鑄成大錯 (*zhu4 cheng2 da4 cuo4* = smelt/forge~become~big~wrong) = committed big/incorrigible mistake. However, clever strategist 將錯就錯 (*jiang1 cuo4 jiu4 cuo4* = use~mistake~oblige~mistake = flexibly links wrong move to new move).

by Diana Yue