

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 World Expo

博

Putonghua pronunciation: *bo2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bok3*

Meanings: wide, broad

博 = wide-encompassing. 博覽群書 (*bo2 lan3 qun2 shu1* = wide~read~crowd~books = reading widely) makes scholar 博學 (*bo2 xue2* = wide~learning = erudite). Brilliant person 博聞強記 (*bo2 wen2 qiang2 ji4* = wide~hear~strong~remember = learns/knows/remembers a lot). 博士 (*bo2 shi4* = erudite~scholar) = Ph.D. Christmas story features 三博士 (*san1 bo2 shi4* = three~ erudite~scholars = the three wise men).

地大物博 (*di4 da4 wu4 bo2* = land~big~materials/objects~broad) describes big region/country rich in flora/fauna/resources. 上海 (*Shang4 Hai3* = Shanghai) held 2010 世界博覽會 (*shi4 jie4 bo2 lan3 hui4* = world~border~wide~see~meet/assembly = World Exposition).

博大精深 (*bo2 da4 jing1 shen1* = broad~big/grand~fine/sharp~deep/penetrating) describes immensely-rich cultures/teachings. Idealist preaches 博愛 (*bo2 ai4* = wide~love = universal/unconditioned benevolence).

by Diana Yue