

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 spring cleaning

積

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jik1*

Meanings: accumulate, save up, hoard

積 (radical 禾 *huo2*, grain-crop) = 累積 (*lei4 ji1* = plenty~accumulate = pile up). 積水 (*ji1 shui3* = accumulated/undrained-water), 積雪 (*ji1 xue* = piled-up~snow). 積糧 (*ji1 liang2* = saving-up~grain/staples/food).

Un-swept corners 積塵 (*ji1 chen2* = accumulate~dust). Un-read documents 積壓 (*ji1 ya4* = accumulate~press = pile up). Enemies 積怨 (*ji1 yuan4* = accumulate~grudge = bear many grudges against each other). Oppressed people have 積憤 (*ji1 fen4* = pent-up~anger).

Sage's New Year advice: Act 積極 (*ji1 ji2* = accumulate~ultimate = positive), but don't 積勞成疾 (*ji1 lao2 cheng2 ji2* = accumulate~labor~become~illness = work too hard, break down). Keep 積蓄 (*ji1 xu4* = accumulate~store = savings). Whenever possible, 積德 (*ji1 de2* = accumulate~virtue/good-karma = be kind, do good works).

by Diana Yue