

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 arithmetics

加

Putonghua pronunciation: *jia1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ga1*

Meaning: add, plus

加 (力 *li4*, strength/effort + 口 *kou3*, mouth/shout) suggests enhancing effort by shouting, hence 加上 (*jia1 shang4* = add-on or also/plus), 加快 (*jia1 kuai4* = increase-speed), 加盟 (*jia1 meng2* = join-alliance).

加入 (*jia1 ru4* = add-in): Cook 加油加糖 (*jia1 you2 jia1 tang2* = adds-oil-adds-sugar) to dishes. However, 加鹽加醋 (*jia1 yan2 jia1 cu4* = add-salt-add-vinegar) describes gossiper exaggerating story. Swimming champion's fans shout "加油!" (*jia1 you2* = add-petrol = step on the gas, "Go, go, go!")

加數 (*jia1 shu4* = adding-sum) = addition. 十加二 (*shi2 jia1 er4* = ten-plus-two) equals twelve. But 加租 (*jia1 zu1* = raising-rent), 加稅 (*jia1 shui4* = raising-taxes), 加價 (*jia1 jia4* = raising-prices) are unpopular measures.

by Diana Yue