

Character Builder 您好學？

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

減

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaam6*

Meaning: subtract, minus, decrease, diminish, reduce, cut, lighten

減 (radical 冫 = 水 *shui3*, water) means reduce/decrease. As typhoon 減弱 (*jian3 ruo4* = diminishes-weakens), rain 減少 (*jian3 shao3* = decreases-lessens). Obese person 減低 (*jian3 di1* = reduces-lowers) meat intake to 減肥 (*jian3 fei2* = reduce-fat/weight, cut pounds).

In slow economy, factories 減產 (*jian3 chan3* = cut-production), shops 減價 (*jian3 jia4* = lower-prices). Government 縮減 (*suo1 jian3* = shrinks/tightens-reduces) expenditure, 減稅 (*jian3 shui4* = cuts-taxes), 減租 (*jian3 zu1* = lowers-rent) to 減輕 (*jian3 qing1* = reduce-lighten) citizens' burden.

減數 (*jian3 shu4* = subtraction-sum) = subtraction. 十減二 (*shi2 jian1 er4* = ten-minus-two) equals eight. But 偷工減料 (*tou1 gong1 jian3 liao4* = steal-work-reduce-materials) means dishonestly supplying insufficient manpower/materials, hence producing sub-standard work.

by Diana Yue