

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 the Olympic Games

競

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging6*

Meanings: pursue, contend, vie, compete

Ideogram 競 shows identical pair running, i.e. competing. 競賽 (*jing4 sai4* = compete~contend = 比賽 *bi3 sai4* = compare~contend) = competition. Applicants 競逐 (*jing4 zhu2* = compete~pursue = vie for) opening. 群芳競艷 (*qun2 fang1 jing4 yan4* = group~fragrant~compete~beauty) describes pretty blooms coming out together or girls in beauty contest.

In 競選 (*jing4 xuan3* = compete~select = election), candidates 競爭 (*jing4 zeng1* = compete~fight/vie = compete). Tough company survives 市場競爭 (*shi4 chang3 jing4 zeng1* = market~field~compete~fight/vie = market competition).

Athletes 競技 (*jing4 ji4* = compete~skills = compete in sports). 龍舟競渡 (*long2 zhou1 jing4 du4* = Dragon~Boats~compete~cross-water) = Dragon Boat Race. 龜兔競走 (*gui1 tu4 jing4 zou3* = tortoise~rabbit/hare~compete~run) is Aesop's famous hare-and-tortoise race.