

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 trains

速

Putonghua pronunciation: *su4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chuk1*

Meaning: fast, quick, rapid, urgent, speed, velocity

速 (radical 辶 *chuo4* = 走 *zou3*, move/run) means 快速 (*kuai4 su1* = fast-speedy), 速度 (*su1 du4* = fast-degree = speed), 速記 (*su1 ji4* = fast-record) = shorthand. 速印 (*su1 yin4* = fast-print) = Xerox-printing. 速成班 (*su1 cheng2 ban1* = fast-complete-class) = crash course. 光速 (*guang1 su1* = light-speed) = speed of light.

Infrastructure construction progresses 神速 (*shen2 su1* = god-fast = at amazing speed). 高速公路 (*gao1 su1 gong1 lu4* = high-speed-public-road = super-highways/autobahns) allow 180 km/h 車速 (*che1 su1* = car/driving-speed).

高速火車 (*gao1 su1 huo3 che1* = high-speed-train) 提速 (*ti2 su1* = raises-speed) to 300 km/h, then 減速 (*jian3 su1* = reduces-speed) to 低速 (*di1 su1* = low-speed) before stopping.

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