

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 New York

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gap1*

Meaning: urgent, impatient, anxious, irritated, fast, quick, rapid, emergency

急 (radical 心 *xin1*, heart) means urgent/anxious: 急事 (*ji2 shi4* = urgent-business), 急件 (*ji2 jian4* = urgent-parcel/document requiring immediate delivery), 急病 (*ji2 zheng4* = sudden-illness), 尿急 (*niao4 ji2* = urine-urgent = urgently wanting to pee).

Downtown New Yorkers 步履急促 (*bu4 lü3 ji2 cu4* = steps-shoes-hurried-fast = walk hurriedly). 性急 (*xing4 ji2* = temperamentally-impatient) investors 急功近利 (*ji2 gong1 jin4 li4* = anxious-achievement-near-profit = are anxious/reckless to make achievements/profits).

Stockmarket's 急升 (*ji2 sheng1* = rapid-rise), 急跌 (*ji2 die2* = rapid-drop/fall), 急瀉 (*ji2 xie4* = rapid-tumble) makes investor 心急如焚 (*xin1 ji2 ru2 fen2* = heart-impatient-resemble-burning = extremely anxious/agitated), 急忙 (*ji2 mang2* = hurriedly-impatiently) calls stockbroker, 急於 (*ji2 yu1* = is-impatient-to) see out.

by Diana Yue