

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 studying and exams

答

Putonghua pronunciation: *da1, da2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *daap3*

Meanings: answer

答 = 回答 (*hui2 da2* = return~reply = answer). Exam scripts pose 問題 (*wen4 ti2* = ask~title = questions), require 答題 (*da2 ti2* = answer~title = answers). Quizzes have 答案 (*da2 an4* = reply~case = answers).

At 口試 (*kou3 shi4* = mouth/oral-examination), smart student 對答如流 (*dui4 da2 ru2 liu2* = respond~answer~resemble~stream = answers unhesitatingly), poor student 答非所問 (*da2 fei1 suo3 wen4* = answer~not~what-is~asked = gives irrelevant answer).

Government 答應 (*da1 ying4* = answer~respond = promises) people to improve economy. Boss 答允 (*da2 yun4* = answer~permit) employee's request. Employee works hard to 報答 (*bao4 da2* = repay~answer = return) boss's kindness. Asked embarrassing question, clever person 笑而不答 (*xiao4 er2 bu4 da2* = smile~and~won't~answer).

by Diana Yue