

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 relatives



Putonghua pronunciation: *bei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *booi3*

Meaning: generation, kind of people

輩 (radical 車 *che1*, chariot/car/cart) means generation/kind/group: 我這一輩子 (*wo3 zhe4 yi1 bei4 zi0* = I/me-this-one-generation-diminutive = my entire life), 同輩 (*tong2 bei4* = same-generation/seniority), 朋輩 (*peng2 bei4* = friends-peers).

Chinese society observes 輩份 (*bei4 fen4* = generation-part = generation hierarchy in clan/circles) strictly. 後輩 (*hou4 bei4* = later/younger-generations e.g. nephew/grandson) honour/obey 先輩 (*xian1 bei4* = early-generations = ancestors), 長輩 (*zhang3 bei4* = older-generations e.g. grandfather/uncle). Younger practitioners call themselves “晚輩” (*wan3 bei4* = evening/ later-generation = juniors), respectfully call seniors “前輩” (*qian2 bei4* = previous-generation = seniors).

鼠輩 (*shu3 bei4* = mouse/rat-generation) = despicable people. 英雄輩出 (*ying1 xiong2 bei4 chu1* = fine-male-generation- emerge) describes rise of numerous heroes/leaders in same epoch.

by Diana Yue