

Character Builder

您好學? 好

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 age



Putonghua pronunciation: *zhāng3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeung2*

Meaning: old, elder, senior, grow, expand

Verb 長 means 生長 (*shēng1 zhāng3* = born-grow = grow). Plants 長葉 (*zhāng3 yè4* = grow-leaves). Teenagers 長肉 (*zhāng3 ròu4* = grow-flesh = put on flesh/muscles). Economy 大幅增長 (*dà4 fú1 zhēng1 zhāng3* = big-sheet/degree-increase-grow = grows spectacularly).

Adjective/noun 長 means elder/senior: 年長 (*nián2 zhāng3* = years-old = senior/elderly), 長輩 (*zhāng3 bei1* = older/senior-generation), 長子 (*zhāng3 zǐ3* = eldest-son), 長官 (*zhāng3 guān1* = senior-officer), 船長 (*chuán2 zhāng3* = ship's-captain).

家長 (*jiā1 zhāng3* = family-senior = parents) watch kids 長大 (*zhāng3 dà4* = grow-big = grow up), 長高 (*zhāng3 gāo1* = grow-tall), hope they 長腦子 (*zhāng3 nǎo3 zǐ0* = grow-brains-diminutive = learn to think), 有長進 (*yǒu3 zhāng3 jìn4* = have-growth-progress = achieve things).

by Diana Yue