

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 rice-planting

耕

Putonghua pronunciation: *geng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaang1*

Meanings: till

Character 耕 = 耒 (*lei3*, plough) + 井 (*jing3*, water-well): 耕田 (*geng1 tian2* = plough~field = 耕作 *geng1 zuo2* = plough~act/work = cultivate/farm land), 春耕 (*chun1 geng1* = springtime~ploughing). 漁樵耕讀 (*yu2 qiao2 geng1 du2* = fishing~lumbering~farming~reading/being-scholar) are traditional professions.

農夫 (*nong2 fu1* = farm~husband = farmer/plowman) cultivates 耕地 (*geng1 di4* = plough~land = fields), 掘土 (*jue2 tu3* = dig/till~soil) using 犁 (*li2*, plough), 耙 (*ba4*, harrow), 鋤 (*chu2*, hoe).

耕耘 (*geng1 yun2* = ploughing~weeding = labor) brings 收穫 (*shou1 huo4* = collect~harvest = reward). Steadfast workers 默默耕耘 (*mo4 mo4 geng1 yun2* = silent~silent~ploughing~weeding) without show/fuss/boasting. Farmers 退耕還林 (*tui4 geng1 huan2 lin2* = retreat~plough/farm~return/restore~forest = give up farming), heeding government's afforestation policy.

by Diana Yue