

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 political parties

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jin3*

Meanings: fight, battle, war

Character 戰 (radical 戈 *ge1*, spear) means war/battle: the two 世界大戰 (*shi4 jie4 da4 zhan4* = world-territory-big-war = world wars), 戰役 (*zhan4 yi4* = fight-military-service = battle). 星球大戰 (*xing1 qiu2 da4 zhan4* = star-spheres-big-war) is Chinese title of movie Star Wars.

After 血戰 (*xue4 zhan4* = bloody-battle), 戰俘 (*zhan4 fu2* = war-captives/PoWs) are captured on 戰場 (*zhan4 chang3* = battlefield).

Old 戰友 (*zhan4 you3* = war-friend = fellow-fighters/comrades) remember China's 1946-49 內戰 (*nei4 zhan4* = internal-war = Civil War). 國民黨 (*guo2 min2 dang3* = state-people-party = Nationalist Party) 戰敗 (*zhan4 bai4* = fight-defeat = lost), 共產黨 (*gong4 chan2 dang3* = common/share-property-party = Communist Party) 戰勝 (*zhan4 sheng4* = fight-victory = won).

by Diana Yue