

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 Solomon's wisdom

Putonghua pronunciation: *shen3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sam2*

Meanings: study, examine, interrogate, judge, trial

Ideogram 審 (宀, house's roof) + 番 (*fan1*, animal's feet) originally meant examining animal footprints indoors. 審慎 (*shen3 shen4* = examine-cautious) = cautious. Art involves 審美 (*shen3 mei3* = examine/judge-beauty = aesthetics).

Senators 審議 (*shen3 yi3* = examine-discuss/debate) bill, 審核 (*shen3 he2* = examine-verify) reports, 審批 (*shen3 pi1* = examine-sign/approve = approve) budgets.

Policemen 審查 (*shen3 cha2* = scrutinize-check) suspects, 審問 (*shen3 wen4* = examine-ask = interrogate) detainees. Court holds 審訊 (*shen3 xün4* = examine-ask = hearing/trial). 陪審團 (*pei2 shen3 tuan2* = accompany-trial-group = jury) 審視 (*shen3 shi4* = examine-look = examines) evidence. Judge 審判 (*shen3 pan4* = examine-judge/decide = passes verdict on) accused. Public boo at traitors at 公審 (*gong1 shen3* = open/public-trial).

by Diana Yue