

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 auctions



Putonghua pronunciation: *zhen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jan1*

Meanings: precious, valuable

珍 (radical 王 *wang2* = 玉 *yü4* = jade) means rare/precious: 珍寶 (*zhen1 bao3* = rare~treasures), 珍珠 (*zhen1 zhu1* = precious~bead = pearl), 珍貴 (*zhen1 gui4* = precious~expensive = valuable). Panda is 珍稀動物 (*zhen1 xi1 dong4 wu4* = precious-rare~moving~thing = rare animal species).

We 珍惜 (*zhen1 xi1* = treasure~love/care = care about) friends, say “珍重!” (*zhen1 zhong4* = treasure~important = “Take care!”) when they depart. Decent person 珍惜羽毛 (*zhen1 xi1 yü3 mao2* = treasure~care-for~plumage~feather = treasures his/her own plumage = wouldn't do anything that would taint his/her own personality/reputation).

Auction houses play up 珍品 (*zhen1 pin3* = valuable-items) from 故宮珍藏 (*gu4 gong1 zhen1 cang2* = past/late-palace~precious~keep = Chinese Imperial Palace's treasured collection).