

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 studying and exams

讀

(radical 言, *yan2* = word/speech)

Putonghua pronunciation: *du2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *duk6*

Meanings: read, read aloud, study

Students 讀書 (*du2 shu1* = read-book = study), 識字 (*shi1 zi4* = learn-words), practice 字 (*zi4*, word/character)'s 讀音 (*du2 yin1* = read/pronounce~sound = pronunciations). 讀本 (*du2 ben3* = read-base/book = text books) offer 導讀 (*dao3 du2* = guide-read = guided reading). Linguists promote 速讀法 (*su4 du2 fa3* = fast-read-method = speed reading).

Libraries welcome 讀者 (*du2 zhe3* = read-person = readers), stage writers/poets' 朗讀會 (*lang3 du2 hui4* = aloud-read-meeting = recital sessions). Lawyer 宣讀 (*xuan1 du2* = pronounce-read = reads out) deceased's will.

讀博士 (*du2 bo2 shi4* = read-study-broad-scholar = studying PhD programme) requires 苦讀 (*ku3 du2* = bitter/hard-read = studying diligently), 讀萬卷書 (*du2 wan4 juan4 shu1* = read-10,000~scroll/volume-books = reading extensively).

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