

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 World Expo

觀

Putonghua pronunciation: *guan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *goon1*

Meanings: watch, view

Verb 觀 has radical 見 (*jian4*, see). 觀察 (*guan1 cha2* = watch~notice) = observe. 觀光 (*guan1 guang1* = see~light) = tour/see places. Astrologers 觀星 (*guan1 xing1* = watch~star = star-gaze). 觀眾 (*guan1 zhong4* = watch~crowd = audience) 觀賞 (*guan1 shang3* = watch~appreciate) movie.

Noun 觀 = view/scope: 微觀 (*wei1 guan1* = micro~scopic), 宏觀 (*hong2 guan1* = macro~scopic). Designers make clothes/decors 美觀 (*mei3 guan1* = beautiful~view = visually appealing/beautiful). 洋洋大觀 (*yang2 yang2 da4 guan1* = grand-flowing~big~view) describes Expo's enormous range/array of exhibits.

Ignorant/parochial/unenlightened people 坐井觀天 (*zuo4 jing3 guan1 tian1* = sit-in~well~watch~sky = have narrow outlooks). 旁觀者清 (*pang2 guan1 zhe3 qing1* = aside~watch~er~clear) means detached onlooker can see/assess situation more clearly than those involved.

by Diana Yue