

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 high-speed trains

趕

(radical 走 *zou3* = run)

Putonghua pronunciation: *gan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gon2*

Meanings: hurry, chase

Verb intransitive 趕 indicates hurrying. 趕來趕去 (*gan3 lai2 gan3 qu4* = hurry-come~hurry-go) = rushing around. Policemen 趕到 (*gan3 dao4* = hurriedly-reach) crime scene. “趕快!” (*gan3 kuai* = hurry~quick) = “Hurry up!”

Verb transitive 趕 means drive/chase. Shepherds 趕羊 (*gan3 yang2* = drive/tend~sheep). Vigilante 趕賊 (*gan3 zei2* = chase-away~thieves). Workers 趕時間 (*gan3 shi2 jian1* = hurry~time~period = pressed by time), do overtime. Lucky commuters 趕上尾班車 (*gan3 shang4 wei3 ban1 che1* = hurry~on/board~tail-round~car = caught the last train/bus).

你追我趕 (*ni3 zui1 wo3 gan3* = you~chase~I~chase) describes keen competition. Hongkong should 趕緊 (*gan2 jin3* = hurry~tight = urgently) build high-speed train, or rivals will 趕過 (*gan3 guo4* = hurry/chase~pass = overtake) us.

by Diana Yue