

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 Cup matches

杯 = 盃

Putonghua pronunciation: *bei2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *booi1*

Meanings: cup

杯 = container: 茶杯 (*cha2 bei1* = tea-cup), 酒杯 (*jiu3 bei1* = wine-glass), 量杯 (*liang4 bei1* = measuring-cup). Party-goers 舉杯 (*ju3 bei1* = raise-glasses), propose toast, 碰杯 (*peng4 bei1* = clink-glasses), say “乾杯!” (*gan1 bei1* = dry-cup/glass = “Bottoms up!”)

杯麵 (*bei1 mian4* = cup-noodles) is convenient snack. 杯水車薪 (*bei1 shui3 che1 xin1* = cup~water~cart~firewood) means small amount inadequate for relieving shortage/poverty.

獎盃 (*jiang3 bei1* = award-cup) = cup trophy: 金盃 (*jin1 bei1* = gold-cup), 銀盃 (*yin2 bei1* = silver-cup). 足球迷 (*zu2 qiu2 mi2* = foot-ball-infatuated = soccer fans) cheer as 世界盃 (*shi4 ji4 bei1* = world-territory~cup = World Cup) winners proudly 捧盃 (*peng3 bei1* = hold-raise cup trophy).