

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 wheat-planting

磨

Putonghua pronunciation: *mo2*, noun *mo4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *moh4*

Meanings: grind, grate, pulverize, mill, grinder

磨 (radical 石 *shi*, stone) = grind/grate: 石磨 (*shi2 mo4* = stone-mill = millstone), 電磨 (*dian4 mo4* = electric-grinder), 磨刀 (*mo2 dao1* = grate/sharpen-knife), 磨損 (*mo2 sun3* = grate-harm = wear and tear). Chinese calligrapher/painter 磨墨 (*mo2 mo4* = rubs-solid-ink-bar on wetted ink-stone to dissolve black soot into liquid ink).

Miller operates 磨坊 (*mo4 fang1* = mill-workshop = mill). 水車 (*shui3 che1* = water-cart = watermill), 風車 (*feng1 che1* = wind-cart = windmill)'s 磨輪 (*mo4 lun2* = mill-wheel) grinds rice, wheat, 玉米 (*yu4 mi3* = jade-rice = maize/corn), 豆 (*dou4*, beans) into flour.

Reader/writer 琢磨 (*zhuo2 mo2* = chisel-rub/polish = carefully studies/refines) book's contents. To weakling, illness/defeat is 折磨 (*zhe2 mo2* = break-grate = torture/suffering).

by Diana Yue