

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 celebrations

歡

Putonghua pronunciation: *huan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foon1*

Meaning: joy, cheer, fondness, cheerful, light-hearted, sexual intercourse

歡 (radical 欠 *qian4*, strain upper-body) means joy/cheer: 歡笑 (*huan1 xiao4* = cheerfully-laugh), 歡聚 (*huan1 ju4* = merry-gathering). Crowds 歡呼 (*huan1 hu1* = joyously-shout/cheer), 歡迎 (*huan1 ying2* = cheer-welcome) hero.

Employee 喜歡 (*xi3 huan1* = likes-loves) day-dreaming, 失歡於 (*shi1 huan1 yu1* = loses-fondness/favor-with) boss. Bachelor feels 獨酌無歡 (*du2 zhuo2 wu2 huan1* = alone-drinking-is-no-fun/joy), looks around for 一夕歡愉 (*yi1 xi2 huan1 yu2* = one-night-of-joy/sexual-pleasure = one-night stand).

Poet 李白 (*Li3 Bai2*) famously wrote: 人生得意須盡歡 (*ren2 sheng1 de2 yi4 xu1 jin4 huan1* = human-life-gain-satisfaction-must-exhaust-joy = Enjoy life to the full). Beethoven's 歡樂頌 (*huan1 le4 song4* = joy-happiness-praise = Old to Joy) has 歡快 (*huan1 kuai4* = cheerful-quick) rhythm.

by Diana Yue