

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 People's Congress

班

Putonghua pronunciation: *ban1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baan3*

Meanings: class, level, team, term

班 (刀 *dao1*, knife slitting two 玉 *yü2*, jade) means class/division/team: 高班 (*gao1 ban1* = higher-class/form), 升班 (*sheng1 ban1* = rise~class/level = get promoted), 馬戲班 (*ma3 xi4 ban1* = horse-play~troupe = circus), 班主 (*ban1 zu3* = troupe~lord = team's boss).

Employees 上班 (*shang4 ban1* = mount~shift = go to work), 下班 (*xia4 ban1* = dismount~work = get off work), avoid 夜班 (*ye4 ban1* = night~shifts). Traveler takes 早班車 (*zao3 ban1 che1* = early-scheduled~car = early bus/train), catches 班機 (*ban1 ji1* = fixed-time~machine/air-plane = scheduled flight).

New 領導班子 (*ling3 dao3 ban1 zi0* = lead~guide~team~diminutive = team of leaders) has strong 班底 (*ban1 di3* = team-base/backing), dismisses those who 不夠班 (*bu4 gou4 ban1* = aren't-adequately~qualified).

by Diana Yue