

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 waltzes



Putonghua pronunciation: *yüan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen4*

Meanings: round, circle, circumference, satisfactory, fulfill, fulfilled

Ideogram 圓 shows 圓圈 (*yüan2 qüan3* = round-circle) enclosing something. 圓形 (*yüan2 xing2* = circle-shape) has 圓周 (*yüan2 zhou1* = circle-rim = circumference). 圓規 (*yüan2 gui1* = circle-regulate) = pair of compasses.

圓 means verb/adjective 圓滿 (*yüan2 man3* = round~full = complete/fulfilled). Bride and groom 圓房 (*yüan2 fang2* = complete-room = had first sexual intercourse as man and wife). Idealist 圓夢 (*yüan2 meng4* = filfills~his-dream). Liar 圓謊 (*yüan2 huang3* = complete-lie = patches up his lie). Monk 圓寂 (*yüan2 ji4* = complete~silence = dies/enters nirvana).

The waltz, transliterated as “華爾滋” (*hua2 er3 zi1*) and translated as “圓舞曲” (*yüan2 wu3 qu3* = round~dance~melody), came from 維也納 (*wei2 ye3 na4* = “Vi-en-na”-transliterated).