

Character Builder 您好學嗎?

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 body-checks

按

Putonghua pronunciation: an4

Cantonese pronunciation: on3

Meaning: press, follow

按 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means pressing down: 按下去 (*an4 xia4 qu4* = press-down-to = press down), 按牢 (*an4 lao2* = press-down-firmly without letting go). Machine operators 按鍵 (*an4 jian4* = press/hit-keys), 按鈕 (*an4 niu3* = press-buttons), 按時 (*an4 shi2* = following-time) means regularly, 按理 (*an4 li3* = according-to-reason) means rationally speaking.

按一按 (*an4 yi1 an4* = press-one-press) = hold back, keep plan/action pending. Patient general 按兵不動 (*an4 bing1 bu4 dong4* = press-army-no-move = makes army lie in waiting).

Doctor 按脈 (*an4 mai4* = press-pulse = feels patient's pulse). 按摩 (*an4 mo3* = press-feel/rub) = massage. Taiji beginners practice 棚 (*peng2*, warding off), 捋 (*li3*, rolling back), 擠 (*ji1*, pressing), 按 (*an4*, pushing).

by Diana Yue