

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 nuclear leakage

爆

Putonghua pronunciation: *bao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baau3*

Meanings: crack, explode, blast, hot oil quick fry

爆 has radical 火 (*huo3*, fire). Fruits 爆開 (*bao4 kai1* = crack~open), releasing seeds. Unhealed wound 爆裂 (*bao4 lie4* = cracks~splits). 火山爆發 (*huo3 shan1 bao4 fa1* = fire~mountain~crack~emit) = volcanic eruption. Shanghainese eat 油爆蝦 (*you2 bao4 xia1* = oil~quick-fry~shrimps). 爆炸裝 (*bao4 zha4 zhuang1* = explode~blast~style) = Afro hairstyle.

爆竹 (*bao4 zhu2* = explode~bamboo) = Chinese firecrackers. 爆炸品 (*bao4 zha4 pin3* = explode~blast~materials) = explosives. Demolishers use 爆破 (*bao4 po4* = explode~break = blasting). Military hold 核爆 (*he2 bao4* = nuclear~explosion) tests.

When earthquake/tsunami crisis 爆發 (*bao4 fa1* = explode~emit = erupts), media 爆出 (*bao4 chu1* = explode~out = blasts out) stunning news: Nuclear plants may 爆炸 (*bao4 zha4* = explode~fry = explode)!

by Diana Yue