

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 Mid-Autumn Festival

Putonghua pronunciation: *yuan* 2

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen* 4

Meanings: round-shaped, spherical, complete, fulfill

圓通 (*yuan*2 *tong*1 = round-through) means wise/flexible.

Outwardly 圓滑 (*yuan*2 *hua*2 = round-slippery = diplomatic/unconfrontational) but actually principled/uncompromising people are 外圓內方 (*wai*4 *yuan*2 *nei*4 *fang*1 = outside-round-inside-square).

花好月圓 (*hua*1 *hao*3 *yue*4 *yuan*2 = flowers-good-moon-round)

symbolizes lovers' bliss. 大團圓 (*da*4 *tuan*2 *yuan*2 = big-lump/ball-round) means happy ending/reunion for all. “功德圓滿!”

(*gong*1 *de*2 *yuan*2 *man*3 = achievement-virtue-round-full) =

“Mission completed!” 圓夢 (*yuan*2 *meng*4 = round-dream) means

“Dream/aspiration fulfilled!” Poets lament: “月有陰晴圓缺!” (*yue*4

*you*3 *yin*1 *qing*2 *yuan*2 *que*1 = moon-has-overcast-sunny-round-part-missing = “Life is not always perfect!”)