

Character Builder 您好學？

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 fame and notoriety

Putonghua pronunciation: *ma4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ma6*

Meaning: abuse, scold, attack, verbally, condemn, curse

罵 (radical 馬 *ma3*, horse + 𠬞 *xūan1*, cacaphony) = 罵人 (*ma4 ren2* = scold/curse-someone): 責罵 (*ze2 ma4* = blame-scold), 痛罵 (*tong4 ma4* = vehemently-condemn), 咒罵 (*zou4 ma4* = curse-abuse). Quarrelling couple 對罵 (*dui4 ma4* = opposite-abuse = shout at each other).

破口大罵 (*po4 kou3 da4 ma4* = break/open-mouth-big-scold) = shout loudly/angrily. 潑婦罵街 (*po2 fu4 ma4 jie1* = bitchy-woman-shouting/cursing-in-street) means 謾罵 (*man4 ma4* = slandering-hurling-abuses indiscriminately). 指桑罵槐 (*zhi3 sang1 ma4 huai2* = point-at-mulberry-tree-curse-pagoda-tree) means blaming A, implying B.

Hero earns 美名 (*mei3 ming2* = beautiful/honorable-name). Traitor earns 罵名 (*ma4 ming2* = cursed-name = notorious/infamous name). Weaklings/cynics 笑罵由人 (*xiao4 ma4 you2 ren2* = laugh-abuse-let-others = tolerate others' taunting/jeers/abuses).

by Diana Yue