

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 diet abstinence

Putonghua pronunciation: *jie4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaai3*

Meanings: guard/caution against, abstain from, rule of forbiddance

Character 戒 shows hands holding 戈 (*ge1*, spear), indicates distrust/alertness: 戒備 (*jie4 bei4* = guard-ready = on guard), 戒嚴 (*jie4 yan2* = guard-tightly-enclosed = curfew), 戒心 (*jie4 xin1* = guard~heart = suspicion). 你戒意嗎? (*ni3 jie4 yi4* = you~guard~idea~interrogative) = Do you mind?

Vegetarians 戒肉 (*jie4 rou4* = do-not~eat~meat). Addicts 戒酒 (*jie4 jiu3* = give-up~wine/liquor), 戒煙 (*jie4 yan1* = give-up~smoking). 戒毒所 (*jie4 du2 suo3* = cut-off~poison~house) = drug treatment/rehabilitation centre.

戒律 (*jie4 lü4* = abstain/forbid~rule = rules/commandments) teach 戒驕 (*jie4 jiao1* = abstain~pride = overcome haughtiness), 戒嗔 (*jie4 chen1* = suppress~anger). 色戒 (*se1 jie4* = color~abstinence) forbids sex/lust. 大開殺戒 (*da4 kai1 sha1 jie4* = big~open/release~kill~rule) = go on a killing spree.

by Diana Yue