

Character Builder

您好學? 呀

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 accidents

撞

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhuang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jong6*

Meaning: hit, collide, clash, strike, bump, shove, knock, charge, crash

撞 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means 撞擊 (*zhuang4 ji1* = collide-hit): 衝撞 (*chong1 zhuang4* = charge-hit), 撞期 (*zhuang4 qi1* = clashing-period/date), 撞色 (*zhuang4 se1* = clashing-colors). Traveler 撞上 (*zhuang4 shang4* = hits-on = comes across) monastery's year-end 撞鐘 (*zhuang4 zhong1* = ram-against-bell = bell-striking/sounding) ceremony, 撞見 (*zhuang4 jian4* = bumps-into-sees) friend.

Rude child 頂撞 (*ding3 zhuang4* = bump-with-head-hit = talks back at) parent. Spy 撞破 (*zhuang4 po4* = crashes-breaks/fouls) conspiracy. Grifters 招搖撞騙 (*zhao1 yao2 zhuang4 pian4* = flaunt-swagger-hit/try-luck-swindle = con/cheat people), 撞車 (*zhuang4 che1* = hit-car) = car crash. Driver 撞倒 (*zhuang4 dao4* = knocks-over/down) pedestrian, yells Cantonese expression “撞鬼” (*zhuang4 gui3* = Cantonese “*jong6 gwai2*” = hit-ghost = “dammit!”)

by Diana Yue