

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 golden week

周

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhou1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jau1*

Meanings: rim, cycle, round, time cycle, week, encircled, all-inclusive

周 (showing 口 *kou3*, mouth) means cycle/encircled. 周圍 (*zhou1 wei2* = rim~surround) = surrounding. 周邊 (*zhou1 bian1* = rim's~side) = neighboring. 周密 (*zhou1 mi4* = encircled~all-inclusive) = faultlessly-calculated/planned. 圓周 (*yuan2 zhou1* = circle's~rim) = circumference. 周期 (*zhou1 qi1* = cycle~period) = cycle. 周而復始 (*zhou1 er2 fu4 shi3* = cycle~and~resume~begin) describes term/cycle's completion and resumption.

周 also means 星期 (*xing1 qi1* = stars~period = week). 一周 (*yi1 zhou1* = one week) has 周日 (*zhou1 ri4* = week~days), 周末 (*zhou1 mo4* = week~end). 周刊 (*zhou1 kan1* = week~publish) = weekly journal.

Couple celebrates wedding 周年 (*zhou1 nian2* = cycle~year = anniversary). Employees look forward to 黃金周 (*huang2 jin1 zhou1* = yellow~gold~week = golden week) holidays.

by Diana Yue