

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 reunion gatherings

聚

Putonghua pronunciation: *jü4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jui6*

Meanings: concentrate, assemble, gather, congregate

聚 shows three 人 (*ren2*, person) at bottom, means concentrate/congregate. 聚會 (*jü4 hui4* = gather-meet) = meeting/assembly. Bees 聚居 (*jü4 jü1* = concentrate~live = swarm) in hives. Family meet for Thanksgiving 團聚 (*tuan2 jü4* = circle-gather = reunion). 物以類聚 (*wu4 yi2 lei4 jü4* = things-by-types~assemble) = birds of a feather flock together.

Election-candidate organizes 聚餐 (*jü4 can1* = gather~feast = banquet parties) to 凝聚 (*ning2 jü4* = solidify~gather = consolidate) faction support.

Old friends 聚首一堂 (*jü4 shou3 yi1 tang2* = assemble~heads-one-hall), cherish 重聚 (*chong2 jü4* = again~meet = reunion gathering), lament 聚散無常 (*jü4 san4 wu2 chang2* = gather~disperse~not-regular/frequent = Life has no certainty — when shall we next come together or drift apart?)