

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 blind groping

偏

Putonghua pronunciation: *pian1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *pin1*

Meanings: tilted, off main track, aside, lop-sided, biased

偏 = remote/biased: 偏遠 (*pian1 yüan3* = remote/faraway) areas, 偏激 (*pian1 ji1* = bent~agitated = un-balanced/radical) views. 不偏不倚 (*bu4 pian1 bu4 yi3* = no~bias~no~leaning) = unbiased/impartial. 中間偏左 (*zhong1 jian1 pian1 zuo3* = middle~ space~ bent~left) describes middle/neutral-left political stand.

Parent with 偏見 (*pian1 jian4* = biased~view/prejudice) 偏愛 (*pian1 ai4* = particularly loves) one child. Old-fashioned education 偏重 (*pian1 zhong4* = lop-sided~heavy/focus = over-emphasizes) rote-learning. Adverb 偏偏 (*pian1 pian1* = biased~biased) means exactly/just as luck/ill-luck would have it. “我偏不去!” (*wo3 pian1 bu4 qu4* = “I~just~won’t-go!”)

瞎子摸象 (*xia1 zi0 mo1 xiang4* = blind~persons~touching~ elephant to guess animal’s appearance) results in 以偏蓋全 (*yi3 pian1 gai4 qüan2* = with~side~cover~full = a partial/incomplete/distorted picture).

by Diana Yue