

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 austerity measures

崩

Putonghua pronunciation: *beng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bang1*

Meanings: collapse, demise, rupture, split apart, crumble

Pictogram 崩 shows 山 (*shan1*, hill/mountain) crashing down on everything: 山崩地裂 (*shan1 beng1 di4 lie4* = mountains~ collapse~ earth~rupture = geological shake-up), 崩堤 (*beng1 di1* = collapse-of~dam). Houses 崩塌 (*beng1 ta1* = crumble~collapse) in landslide. 駕崩 (*jia4 beng1* = royal-chariot~collapse) = death of king/emperor.

Gynecology term 血崩 (*xue3 beng1* = blood~collapse) means vaginal haemorrhage, metrorrhagia. 崩牙 (*beng1 ya2* = collapse~tooth = tooth/teeth shown to be missing from mouth), 崩鼻 (*beng1 bi2* = collapsed/broken~nose) are facetious Cantonese descriptions.

Non-productive country 坐食山崩 (*zuo4 shi2 shan1 beng1* = sit~eat~mountain~collapse = exhausts all resources/savings). Austerity measures following 崩盤 (*beng1 pan2* = collapse-of~market-trading-prices = stock market crash) make everyone 精神崩潰 (*jing1 shen2 beng1 kui4* = essence~spirit~collapse~ break = get mental breakdown).

by Diana Yue