

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 fortune-telling



Putonghua pronunciation: *xiōng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung1*

Meanings: unlucky, bad, ominous, fierce, calamity

凶兆 (*xiōng1 zhāo4* = unlucky/bad-omen) portends 倒霉 (*dǎo3 mei2* = toppled-mould = luckless), 凶險 (*xiōng1 xiǎn3* = terrible-dangerous) events. 通書 (*tōng1 shū1* = through-book = fortune-telling almanac) predicts 災禍 (*zāi1 huò4* = calamity-misfortune) may fall on 凶日 (*xiōng1 rì4* = bad-luck-days), advises ways to 趨吉避凶 (*qū1 jì2 bì4 xiōng1* = approach/follow-fortune-avoid-misfortune).

凶神惡煞 (*xiōng1 shén2 è4 shā4* = bad-gods-evil-demons = fierce devils) describes fierce/threatening people/gestures. 窮凶極惡 (*qióng2 xiōng1 jì2 è4* = exhaust-fierce-most-bad/evil) describes merciless bullies/oppressors.

Police calculate kidnapped children 凶多吉少 (*xiōng1 duō1 jì2 shǎo3* = bad-luck-more-good-luck-less = probably met ill fate), but maybe they 逢凶化吉 (*fēng2 xiōng1 huà4 jì2* = meet-misfortune-transform-into-fortune = luckily avoided misfortune and are safe).

by Diana Yue