

Character Builder 您好嗎？攻

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 Achilles

攻

Putonghua pronunciation: *gong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gung1*

Meanings: attack, offensive, aggression

攻 (radical 工 *gong1*, work) originally meant engineering works for attacking city, now means 攻打 (*gong1 da3* = attack~assail). 圍攻 (*wei2 gong1* = surround-and~attack) prey. Boxer launches 攻勢 (*gong1 shi4* = attack~force = wave of attack). 攻心 (*gong1 xin1* = attack~heart) = use psychological, persuasive tactics.

用火攻 (*yong4 huo3 gong1* = use~fire~attack) = burn enemy's camp/ships. 以毒攻毒 (*yi3 du2 gong1 du2* = with~poison~attack~poison) = fight nasty enemy with nasty means.

Homer described siege of Troy: Achilles 攻擊 (*gong1 ji1* = attacked~assailed), slew Trojan warrior Hector. Greeks 攻城 (*gong1 cheng2* = attacked~city), Trojans 守城 (*shou3 cheng2* = defended city). Troy 久攻不下 (*jiu3 gong1 bu4 xia4* = long~attack~no~fall = did not fall despite drawn-out attacks).