

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 golden week



Putonghua pronunciation: *men1, men4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *moon6*

Meanings: muffled, sealed, stuffy, stifling, stifled, suppressed, boring, bored, melancholic

悶 (門 *men2*, doors enclosing 心 *xin1*, heart) means stuffy/boring: 悶熱 (*men4 re4* = stifling-hot), 悶雷 (*men4 lei2* = muffled-thunder = dry thunder), 沉悶 (*chen2 men1* = sink-boring = uninteresting/boring).

悶葫蘆 (*men4 hu2 lu2* = sealed-gourd-bottle) = uncommunicative person. 悶蛋 (*men4 dan4* = boring-egg) = a real bore. Sly enemy 悶聲不響 (*men1 sheng1 bu4 xiang3* = suppress-voice-no-sound = noiselessly) deals 悶棍 (*men4 gun4* = stifled-stick = unannounced blow/attack).

悶局 (*men4 ju2* = stifled-game = stalemate in chess or non-progressing situation) produces 苦悶 (*ku3 men4* = bitter-boredom = ennui). Don't be 悶悶不樂 (*men4 men4 bu4 le4* = bored-bored-no-happy = depressed). 找樂去! (*zhao3 le4 qu4* = seek-happy-go) = Go get some fun!

by Diana Yue