

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 resting

Putonghua pronunciation: *huan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woon6*

Meanings: slow-paced, slow down, relax, delay, postpone

緩 (radical 纟 = 絲 *si1*, silk/thread) means 緩慢 (*huan3 man4* = slow~slow-paced). Runner doing 緩步跑 (*huan3 bu4 pao3* = slow~steps~run = slow jog) pauses to 緩氣 (*huan3 qi4* = slow-down~breath = ease his breath). After negotiations, tensions 緩和 (*huan3 he2* = slow~harmony = are eased/relaxed).

事有緩急之分 (*shi4 you3 huan3 ji1 zhi1 fen1* = affairs~have~non-urgent~urgent~'s~difference = actions can be prioritized according to their urgency). Non-urgent actions can 暫緩 (*zan4 huan3* = temporarily~postpone = can wait).

Transitive verb 緩 means halt/delay: 緩刑 (*huan3 xing2* = delay~torture/sentence = suspended sentence), 緩衝區 (*huan3 chong1 qu1* = slow-down~clash~area = buffer zone). 緩兵之計 (*huan3 bing1 zhi1 ji4* = slow~army~'s~tactic = stalling tactics) can delay oncoming threat/attack.