

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 Flaming Mountains

擋

Putonghua pronunciation: *dang3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dong2*

Meanings: obstruct, block, ward off, dodge

擋 (扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand + 當 *dang1*, confront) means obstruct. Umbrella 擋雨 (*dang3 yu3* = fends-off-rain). Boxer 擋開 (*dang3 kai1* = wards-off) blow. 擋風玻璃 (*dang3 feng1 bo1 li3* = obstruct-wind-glass) = windscreen.

螳臂擋車 (*tang2 bi4 dang3 che1* = praying-mantis' arm-obstructing-cart) means weakly/hopelessly trying to 阻擋 (*zhu2 dang3* = stop/dodge-obstruct) powerful attacker/invader.

Xinjiang's 火焰山 (*Huo3 Yan4 Shan1* = fire-flame-mountain-range = Flaming Mountains) are on the 北絲路 (*bei3 si1 lu4* = northern-Silk-Road). Sunlit 花崗岩 (*hua1 gang1 yan2* = motley-hill-rock = granite) looks like 火焰 (*huo3 yan4* = fiery-flames). In Journey to the West, the mountains are real 火舌 (*huo3 she2* = fire-tongue = tongues of fire), 擋路 (*dang3 lu4* = blocking-the-way).

by Diana Yue