

Character Builder 您好學？

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 abusive language



Putonghua pronunciation: *gui3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwai3*

Meaning: ghost, phantom, spook, demon, apparition, devil

鬼 (*gui3*, from 歸 *gui1*, return) means 鬼魂 (*gui3 hun2* = ghost/phantom/spook-spirit). Ancients 拜鬼神 (*bai4 gui3 shen2* = worship-spirits-gods), fear 鬼怪 (*gui3 guai4* = ghosts-demons). 鬼 has scary/bad image. 吊死鬼 (*diao4 si3 gui3* = hang-dead-ghost = hanged man turned into ghost). 酒鬼 (*jiu3 gui3* = liquor/wine-ghost) = alcoholic. 色鬼 (*se1 gui3* = color/woman-ghost) = womanizer. 懶鬼 (*lan3 gui3* = lazy-ghost) = lazybone. 死鬼 (*si3 gui3* = dead-ghost) refers to anyone hated/disliked. However, 扮鬼臉 (*ban4 gui3 lian3* = pretend-ghost-face) means make funny face.

Traitor 心裡有鬼 (*xin1 li3 you3 gui3* = heart-interior-has-ghost = hides malice), 說鬼話 (*shuo1 gui3 hua4* = say-ghost-speech = talks lies/nonsense), 搞鬼 (*gao3 gui3* = stir-ghost = makes trouble).