

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 precious stones

鑲

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *seung1*

Meanings: set, cast, inlay, lining

鑲 has radical 金 (*jin1*, gold/metal). Dentist 鑲牙 (*xiang1 ya2* = set~tooth) = makes teeth's filling/bridge. Lady's blouse has lace 鑲邊 (*xiang1 bian1* = line~edge = hem).

Precious stones require 割切 (*ge1 qie4* = slice~cut = cutting), 鑲嵌 (*xiang1 qian4* = set/cast-inlay = casting). Jeweler designs 指環 (*zhi3 huan2* = finger~ring = rings/bands), 項鍊 (*xiang4 lian3* = neck~chain = necklaces), 別針 (*bie2 zhen1* = pin~needle = pins), sets gem-stones in 白金 (*bai2 jin1* = white~gold = platinum), 十四k金 (*shi2 si4 ke1 jin1* = ten~four-k-gold = 14 karat gold). Cartier jewelry has fine 鑲工 (*xiang1 gong1* = set/cast-workmanship = casting).

景泰藍 (*jing3 tai4 lan2* = Ming-Dynasty-Emperor-Jingtai's-reign-period~blue) = cloisonné-ware) has blue/multi-color enamel body and gold/bronze-thread inlay.

by Diana Yue