

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 photographers

機

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gei1*

Meanings: machine, opportunity, organic, wit

機 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) means machine: 機器 (*ji1 qi1* = machine~tool = machine), 機件 (*ji1 jian4* = machine~parts), 飛機 (*fei1 ji1* = flying~machine = air-plane), 機組 (*ji1 zu3* = machine/plane~group = plane's crew).

開機 (*kai1 ji1* = open~machine), 關機 (*guan1 ji1* = close~ machine) means switching machine on/off, esp. 手機 (*shou3 ji1* = hand-machine = mobile-phone/cell-phone), 電視機 (*dian4 shi4 ji1* = electric~vision~machine = TV). 打機 (*da3 ji1* = hit~ machine) means playing electronic games. 數碼機 (*shu4 ma3 ji1* = numbers~codes~machine = digital camera) is nicknamed 傻瓜機 (*sha3 gua1 ji1* = idiot~gourd~camera, i.e. no-tech camera).

機智 (*ji1 zhi4* = quick/alert~smart/clever) people may 機關算盡 (*ji1 guan1 shuan4 jin4* = machinery~blocks/traps~calculate~exhaust = plot/calculate too meticulously/meanly).

by Diana Yue