

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

閒

Putonghua pronunciation: *xian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haan4*

Meanings: idle, unoccupied, leisure, irrelevant, unimportant

閒 (月 *yue4*, moon inside 門 *men2*, door) means idle/irrelevant/unimportant: 空閒 (*kong1 xian2* = unoccupied-free-time), 閒錢 (*xian2 qian2* = spare/unlocked-in~money/savings), 閒談 (*xian2 tan2* = leisurely/informal~chat), 閒逛 (*xian2 guang4* = leisurely~stroll). 閒書 (*xian2 shu1* = leisure~book) = light books for leisurely reading.

Media star looks 氣定神閒 (*qi4 ding4 shen2 xian2* = air~steady~spirit~leisurely = calm/composed/self-assured), denies 閒言閒語 (*xian2 yan2 xian2 yu3* = irrelevant~words~irrelevant~speech = gossip), criticizes reporters for 管閒事 (*guan3 xian2 shi4* = poking-into~others's~affairs). Lab-door sign says "閒人免進" (*xian2 ren2 mian3 jin4* = "Unrelated-persons~no~entry").

Everyone enjoys 偷得浮生半日閒 (*tou1 de0 fu2 sheng1 ban4 ri4 xian2* = steal-get~floating/transient~life~half~day~free = snatching a short break from a busy schedule.)