

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 Chinese sun god



Putonghua pronunciation: *gong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gung1*

Meanings: bow

Ideogram 弓 has shape resembling bent bow. Archer uses 弓箭 (*gong1 jian4* = bow-and-arrow). In Chinese mythology, great archer 后羿 (*Hou4 Yi4* = Hou Yi) used 神弓 (*shen2 gong1* = god-bow = magic/mighty-bow) and shot down nine suns. Violinist moves 琴弓 (*qin2 gong1* = violin~bow) on 琴弦 (*qin2 xian2* = violin~strings), practices 弓法 (*gong1 fa3* = bowing~ techniques).

弓形 (*gong1 xing2* = bow~shape) = bow/arc-shaped. 弓身為禮 (*gong1 shen1 wei2 li3* = bow~body~as~ritual/courtesy) = make polite bow. 弓腰 (*gong1 yao1* = bow~waist) = bend waist like stretched bow forwards or backwards.

Idiom 杯弓蛇影 (*bei1 gong1 she2 ying3* = cup~bow~snake~shadow) describes neurotic/suspicious person getting far-fetched fears/illusions — thought a bow's shadow was a snake put in his cup.

by Diana Yue