

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 conversion to Buddhism

閉

Putonghua pronunciation: *bi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bai3*

Meanings: close, block

閉 (門 *men2*, door enclosing 才 *cai2*, materials) = 關閉 (*guan1 bi4* = close~closed). Flooded roads 封閉 (*feng1 bi4* = sealed~closed = are closed). 閉幕禮 (*bi4 mo4 li3* = close~curtains~ceremony) = closing ceremony.

Blood-vessels 閉塞 (*bi4 sai1* = close~block = clog up). 閉經 (*bi4 jing1* = close~meridian/menstruation) = women's menopause. 閉路電視 (*bi4 lu4 dian4 shi4* = close~path~electric~vision) = closed-circuit television. 閉口! (*bi4 kou3* = close~mouth) = Shut up!

Bitterly wronged person yells 死不閉目 (*si3 bu4 bi4 mu4* = die~no~close~eyes = My dead soul won't rest in peace!) Hermit 閉門謝客 (*bi4 men2 xie4 ke4* = close~door~thank/refuse~visitor = decline visitors/invitations). Meditating monk 閉關 (*bi4 guan1* = close~gates/pass = lives/prays in absolute seclusion).

by Diana Yue