

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 mahjong

家

Putonghua pronunciation: *jia1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ga1*

Meanings: family, home, group, player, expert

Ideogram 家 (宀, roof sheltering 豕 *shi3*, pig) means home/family/activity-base/expert. 持家 (*chi2 jia1* = hold/handle-home) = keep house. 酒家 (*jiu3 jia1* = wine-house) = restaurant. 名家 (*ming2 jia1* = famous-practitioner) = expert/master. In gambling, 莊家 (*zhuang1 jia1* = manor-seat-player) means the banker.

麻將 (*ma2 jiang4* = mahjong) has 四家 (*si4 jia1* = four-players). Players stack 麻將牌 (*ma2 jiang4 pai2* = mahjong-tiles) into four rows forming square, each starts with 13-tile hand, 摸牌 (*mo1 pai2* = touch/take-a-tile), 打牌 (*da3 pai2* = hit/eject-another-tile), watch 上家 (*shang4 jia1* = upper-hand-player), 下家 (*xia4 jia1* = lower-hand-player), 對家 (*dui4 jia1* = opposite-player) change tiles.

旺家 (*wang4 jia1* = roaring-flame/prosperous-player) means lucky guy consistently getting good hands and winning.

by Diana Yue