

Character Builder

您好學？

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 Beijing

環

Putonghua pronunciation: *huan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *waan4*

Meanings: ring, loop, section, encircle

環 (radical 王 = 玉 *yü4*, jade) means ring/circle: 指環 (*zhi3 huan2* = finger-ring), 花環 (*hua1 huan2* = floral-wreath), 光環 (*guang1 huan2* = light-ring = halo), 環節 (*huan2 jie2* = ring-section) = part/section. 一環扣一環 (*yi1 huan2 kou4 yi1 huan2* = one-loop-hooks-one-loop) describes tightly-knit occurrences/sequels.

環繞 (*huan2 rao3* = encircle-surround): 環球 (*huan2 qiu2* = encircling-globe = worldwide), 環境 (*huan2 jing4* = surrounding-area/circumstances = environment), 環保 (*huan2 bao3* = environmental-protection). 四季循環 (*si4 ji4 xun2 huan2* = four-seasons-follow-circle) = rotation of four seasons,

環城路 (*huan2 cheng2 lu4* = encircle-city-road) = ring road, e.g. Beijing's 二環 (*er4 huan2* = second-ring), 三環 (*san3 huan3* = third-ring), 六環 (*liu4 huan2* = sixth-ring, furthest out).