

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 San Francisco

岸

Putonghua pronunciation: *an4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngon6*

Meaning: shore, bank, coast

岸 (radical 山 *shan1*) means high ground on water-edge: 海岸線 (*hai3 an4 xian4* = sea/ocean-coast-line), 河岸 (*he2 an4* = river-bank). Boat 泊岸 (*bo2 an4* = parks-by-shore), passengers 登岸 (*deng1 an4* = go-on-shore). Artist paints 沿岸風景 (*yuan2 an4 feng1 jin4* = along-shore-wind/customs-scene = coastal landscape).

Buddhists preach “苦海無邊，回頭是岸” (*ku3 hai3 wu2 bian1, hui2 tou2 sh4i an4* = sufferings-sea-no-end, turn-head-is-shore/land = life is all sorrow; repent, find rest/enlightenment). Paris' River seine has 右岸 (*you4 an4* = right-bank), 左岸 (*zuo3 an4* = left-bank) where intellectuals gathered, yielding term 左傾 (*zuo3 qing1* = left-leaning/“leftist”).

San Francisco is in 加州 (*Jia1 zhou1* = “Cal”ifornia-transliterated-state), on US's 西岸 (*xi1 an4* = west-coast).

by Diana Yue