

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 shopping malls

Putonghua pronunciation: **zuo4**

Cantonese pronunciation: **joh6**

Meanings: sit, ride

坐 means sit (“請坐!” = **qing3 zuo4** = “Please~sit-down!”), ride (坐車 = **zuo4 che1** = ride~car). 座位 (**zuo4 wei4** = seat~place) = seat.

Shoppers 坐下 (**zuo4 xia4** = sit~down) in 咖啡店 (**ka1 fei1 dian4** = “coffee”-transliterated~shop = café/coffee-shop) for 下午茶 (**xia4 wu3 cha2** = low~noon~tea = afternoon tea), admire ladies’ 坐姿 (**zuo4 zi1** = sitting~postures), sigh: “偷得浮生半日閒!” (**tou1 de2 fu2 sheng1 ban4 ri4 xian2** = steal~acquire~floating~life~half~day~leisure = “Snatch a short break!”)

坐視不理 (**zuo4 shi4 bu4 li3** = sit~watch~no~heed) means turning a blind eye on problem/trouble. Unemployed people worry about 坐食山崩 (**zuo4 shi2 shan1 beng1** = sit~eat~mountain~collapse = using up all savings).