

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 beginning and end



Putonghua pronunciation: *yüan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen4*

Meaning: round, spherical, fulfill, perfect, complete, completion

圓 (radical 囗 *wei2*, surround) means 圓形 (*yüan2 xing2* = round/circular/spherical-shaped): 圓臉 (*yüan2 lian3* = round-faced), 圓筒 (*yüan2 tong3* = round-cylinder), 同心圓 (*tong2 xin1 yüan2* = con-centric-circles). 圓桌武士 (*yüan2 zhuo1 wu3 shi4* = round-table-military-men) = Knights of the Round Table.

圓圈 (*yüan2 quan1* = round-circle), 圓環 (*yüan2 huan2* = round/circular-ring) symbolize fulfilled/unending process/cycle. Dreamer 圓夢 (*yüan2 meng4* = fulfills-dream/ideal). 花好月圓 (*hua1 hao3 yüe4 yüan2* = flowers-good-moon-round) symbolizes lovers' bliss. Broken-up family 團圓 (*tuan2 yüan2* = lump/ball-round = are re-united).

Sage aspires to 圓通 (*yüan2 tong1* = all-embracing-understanding/wisdom), 圓明 (*yüan2 ming2* = perfect-enlightenment). Monk entering nirvana says: “功德圓滿!” (*gong1 de2 yüan2 man3* = efforts-virtue-perfected-fulfilled = “Moral mission completed!”)

by Diana Yue