

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 partying

Putonghua pronunciation: *nao* 4

Cantonese pronunciation: *naau* 6

Meanings: noise, clamor, row, disturbance

鬧 = noisy: 鬧市 (*nao4 shi4* = noisy~market = busy downtown), 鬧鐘 (*nao4 zhong1* = noisy~clock = alarm clock). Kids 吵鬧 (*chao3 nao4* = quarrel/clamor~yell). Party-goers 趁熱鬧 (*chen4 re4 nao4* = follow-hot-noisy = go after the fun/crowds).

Bullies 鬧事 (*nao4 shi4* = clamor~action = make scenes). Drunkards 鬧酒 (*nao4 jiu3* = clamor~liquor/wine = create drunken row). Sulking girlfriend 鬧情緒 (*nao4 qing2 xu4* = disturbed~feeling~mood = show-off whims). Clowns play 鬧劇 (*nao4 ju2* = noisy/ridiculous~drama = farce). “不准胡鬧!” (*bu4 zhun3 hu2 nao4* = no~allow~barbaric/unruly~row) = “Stop being silly/naughty/rude!”

Cantonese 鬧 = Putonghua 罵 (*ma4* = reprimand/reproach/scold). “鬧醒你!” (*naau6 sing2 nei5* = scold~waken~you) means “I’m telling you off to make you understand!”