

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 leisure

停

Putonghua pronunciation: *ting2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ting4*

Meanings: stop, halt

Ideogram 停 shows 亻 (= 人 *ren2*, person) stopping at 亭 (*ting2* = pavilion/kiosk): 停止 (*ting2 zhi3* = stop~still), 停留 (*ting2 liu2* = stop~stay = remain/continue), 停雨 (*ting2 yu3* = stop~rain = rain has stopped), 停電 (*ting2 dian4* = stop~electricity = blackout/power-cut), 停車 (*ting2 che1* = stop~car).

When project 停頓 (*ting2 dun4* = stops~halts), workers 停工 (*ting2 gong1* = stop~work), 手停口停 (*shou3 ting2 kou3 ting2* = hands~stop~mouth~stops = unemployed, starve).

Workaholics 忙個不停 (*mang2 ge4 bu4 ting2* = busy-themselves~a~non-stop), but if 思想停滯 (*si1 xiang3 ting2 zhi4* = ideas~concepts~stop~sluggish = brain slackens) they should 慢下來 (*man4 xia4 lai2* = slow~down~come = slow down), 停下來 (*ting2 xia4 lai2* = stop~down~come = stop).