

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 drinking

杯

Putonghua pronunciation: *bei1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *boo11*

Meanings: cup, glass

杯 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) = 杯子 (*bei1 zi0* = cup~diminutive) = cup: 水杯 (*shui3 bei1* = water-glass), 茶杯 (*cha2 bei1* = tea~cup), 酒杯 (*jiu3 bei1* = wine/liquor~glass), 杯麵 (*bei1 mian4* = cup~noodle). Drinkers 舉杯 (*ju3 bei12* = raise~cup). Alcoholic 貪杯 (*tan1 bei1* = wants/craves~cup), loves 杯中物 (*bei1 zhong4 wu4* = cup~inside's~thing, i.e. wine/liquor).

杯 is quantity measurement: 一杯咖啡 (*yi1 bei1 ka1 fei11* = a ~cup-of~"coffee"-transliterated)". 杯水車薪 (*bei1 shui3 che1 xin1* = cup-of~water~cartload-of~firewood = hopelessly splashing cup of water on cartload of burning firewood) describes inadequate means/budget.

Suspicious person 杯弓蛇影 (*bei1 gong1 she2 ying3* = cup~bow~snake~shadow = seeing wine-cup reflecting shape of a bow, thinks he is seeing a snake).

by Diana Yue