

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 World War II

攻

Putonghua pronunciation: *gong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gung1*

Meaning: attack, assail, assault, offensive

攻 (工 *gong1*, engineering + 支 *pu1*, execute) means conduct work/efforts: 攻勢 (*gong1 shi4* = attack-force = offensive), 攻打 (*gong1 da3* = attack-hit/storm). Slanderer launches 人身攻擊 (*ren2 shen1 gong1 ji1* = human-body-offensive-attack = personal attacks), but rumours 不攻自破 (*bu4 gong1 zi4 po4* = no-attack-self-break = disintegrate before denial/rebuttal is made).

攻讀 (*gong1 du2* = try-hard-read) = study diligently. 以毒攻毒 (*yi3 du2 gong1 du2* = with-poison/venom-attack-poison/venom) describes doctor's/strategist's use of venom/malice against illness/attack.

Invaders 進攻 (*jin4 gong1* = advance-on-attack) neighbors, 攻無不克 (*gong1 wu2 bu4 ke1* = attack-no-not-conquer = always score victories). Invaded countries form 攻守同盟 (*gong1 shou3 tong2 meng2* = offensive-defensive-same-pact = coalition/alliance), 反攻 (*fan3 gong1* = launch counter-attack).

by Diana Yue