

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 walls

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wai 4*

Meanings: surround, enclose, encircle, besiege

圍 shows square enclosure. 圍欄 (*wei2 lan2* = enclosing~fence/railing), 圍牆 (*wei2 qiang2* = surrounding~wall). Planets 圍繞 (*wei2 rao3* = encircle~turn-around) the sun. 圍棋 (*wei2 qi2* = surround~chess) = Chinese chess-game weiqi = Japanese go. Woman's 三圍 (*san1 wei2* = three~round) = bust-measurement, waist-measurement, hips-measurement.

Lions 圍攻 (*wei2 gong1* = surround~attack) buffalo; other animals 圍觀 (*wei2 guan1* = surround~watch = stand around, watch). Invaders 圍城 (*wei2 cheng2* = besiege~castle/fortress), soldiers inside 突圍 (*tu1 wei2* = jut-out~siege = charge through enemy's siege).

圍魏救趙 (*wei2 Wei4 jiu4 Zhao4* = besiege~Wei-to-save~Zhao) was brilliant military strategy: 魏 (*Wei4*)'s army lay siege on 趙 (*Zhao4*)'s capital. 齊 (*Qi2*)'s rescuing army lay siege on Wei's capital. Wei had to lift its siege on Zhao.