

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 divorce

勸

Putonghua pronunciation: *qüan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *huen3*

Meanings: urge, encourage, discourage, try to persuade

勸 (radical 力 *li4*, effort) = try to persuade: 勸說 (*qüan4 shui4* = urge~persuade = use persuasion), 勸告 (*qüan4 gao4* = urge~advise). Doctor 勸導 (*qüan4 dao3* = urge~guide = counsels) patient to quit smoking. 勸酒 (*qüan4 jiu3* = urge~alcohol/wine) = nagging at someone to drink more wine.

In politics, 勸進 (*qüan4 jin4* = urge~advance) means encouraging someone to take power, 勸退 (*qüan4 tui4* = urge~retreat) means politely asking/forcing someone not to take power.

Couple 打架 (*da3 jia4* = hit~rack = fight), friends 勸架 (*qüan4 jia4* = urge~rack = urge them to stop fighting). Wife files for divorce, friends 苦勸 (*ku3 qüan4* = bitter/hard~urge = urge hard) but 勸不動 (*qüan4 bu4 dong4* = urge~no~move = persuasion doesn't work).

by Diana Yue