

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 pipe organs



Putonghua pronunciation: *qin2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kam4*

Meanings: qin, lute, zither, lyre, keyboard or string musical instrument

Ideogram 琴 has radical 珏 (*jüe2* = two jade-pieces jingling). 古琴 (*gu3 qin2* = ancient-zither = Chinese qin) is strummed. 胡琴 (*hu2 qin2* = northwestern Hu-region's~stringed-instrument) is played with bow. Elegant people practice 琴棋書畫 (*qin2 qi2 shu1 hua4* = qin, chess/Go, calligraphy, painting).

鋼琴 (*gang1 qin2* = steel~琴) = piano. 提琴 (*ti2 qin2* = pickup/hold~琴) = violin/viola/cello/double-bass. 管風琴 (*guan3 feng1 qin2* = pipe~wind~琴) = pipe organ.

琴's meaning varies in context: 琴鍵 (*qin2 jian4* = piano/organ keys), 琴弦 (*qin2 xian2* = violin/guitar~strings), 琴譜 (*qin2 pu3* = instrumental~score). 琴聲美妙 (*qin2 sheng1 mei3 miao4* = 琴~sound~beautiful~wonderful) = lovely playing. 琴鳥 (*qin2 niao3* = lyre~bird) has beautiful plumage.