

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: *ge* 2

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaak* 3

Meanings: separate, isolate

隔 = separate: 分隔 (*fen1 ge2* = part~separate) sheep from goats, 隔離 (*ge2 li2* = separate~leave = isolate) virus-carriers. Next-door is 隔壁 (*ge4 bi2* = separated-by~wall) or Cantonese 隔離 (*gaak3 lei4* = separated-by~bamboo-fence). Prison-walls 隔絕 (*ge2 jue2* = separated-entirely-from) prisoners from world.

Raincoats 隔水 (*ge2 shui3* = shuts-out~water). Vacuums 隔熱 (*ge2 re1* = insulate~heat). Recording studios have 隔聲設備 (*ge2 sheng1 she4 bi4* = separate~sound~install~prepare = sound-proof facilities). Estranged acquaintances feel 隔膜 (*ge2 mo4* = separate~membrane = uneasy/unfamiliar), but 橫隔膜 (*heng2 ge2 mo4* = horizontal~separate~membrane) means the diaphragm.

隔山買牛 (*ge2 shan1 mai3 niu2* = separated-by~hill-buy-ox) means buying/investing blindly. 隔岸觀火 (*ge2 an4 guan1 huo3* = across~shore-watch~fire) means coolly watching others' calamity unfold.