

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

分

Putonghua pronunciation: *fen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fan1*

Meanings: divide, split, separate, lot

分 shows 刀 (*dao1*, knife) splitting object, means divide/separate: 分開 (*fen1 kai1* = separate-open = divided), 分別 (*fen1 bie2* = separate-distinguish = difference), 分界 (*fen1 jie4* = dividing-line/border), 分析 (*fen1 xi1* = separately-dissect = analyze).

Avenue 分叉 (*fen1 cha4* = split-fork = splits into) lanes. Bosom friends 分享 (*fen1 xiang3* = divide-enjoy = share) thoughts.

Successful shop opens 分店 (*fen1 dian4* = branch-shop).

Estranged partners 分道揚鑣 (*fen1 dao4 yang2 biao1* = separate-road-wave-carriage-banner = go separate ways).

Couple 分手 (*fen1 shou3* = separate-hands = split up), 分居 (*fen1 ju1* = separately-reside = live apart), discuss 分家 (*fen1 jia1* = split-family = splitting family assets), 財產分配 (*cai1 chan3 fen1 pei4* = wealth-property-divide-allot = assets distribution).

by Diana Yue