

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 the civil wars

撕

Putonghua pronunciation: *si1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *si1*

Meanings: tear, rip, rend

撕 = radical 扌 (= 手 *shou3*, hand) + sound “斯 *si1*”: 撕開 (*si1 kai1* = tear-open), 撕破 (*si1 po4* = tear/rip-break/open), 撕掉 (*si1 diao4* = tear~up), 撕碎 (*si1 sui4* = tear~into-pieces). 手撕扯 (*si1 che3* = tear-tug/pull at) star's clothes. 手撕雞 (*shou3 si1 ji1* = hand-shred~chicken) is whole-fried then hand-shredded.

撕票 (*si1 piao4* = tear~ticket) means 綁匪 (*bang3 fei3* = tie-thug = kidnappers) kill victim of 綁架案 (*bang3 jia4 an4* = tie~hold~case = kidnapping case). 撕下假面具 (*si1 xia4 jia3 mian4 ju4* = tear~split~false~face~utensil/mask) means tearing/pulling off cheat's mask, exposing his falsehood.

Dissidents 撕毀 (*si1 hui3* = tear-up~destroy) peace agreement.
Civil war 撕裂 (*si1 lie4* = tear~break/crack = rips apart) country.