

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

栓

Putonghua pronunciation: *shuan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saan1*

Meanings: stop, valve, bolt, plug, cork, stopper

栓 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) = stop/block: 門栓 (*men2 shuan1* = door-bolt), 耳栓 (*er3 shuan1* = ear~block = ear-plug). Beware when gunman 拉槍栓 (*la1 qiang1 shuan1* = pulls~rifle~bolt). 栓子 (*shuan1 zi0* = block~diminutive = air-bubble/blood-clot) causes 腦血栓 (*nao3 xue3 shuan1* = brain~blood~block = thrombosis).

Organ-player presses 琴鍵 (*qin2 jian4* = organ's-keys). 閥門 (*fa3 men2* = valve~door = valves) open, air rushes into 風琴管 (*feng1 qin2 guan3* = organ pipes), producing sounds.

Organ has many 音色栓 (*yin1 se1 shuan1* = sound~color~stop = stops). 拉起 (*la1 qi3* = pulling~up) a stop's knob/tab changes 音色 (*yin1 se1* = sound~color/type, e.g. violin-sound, flute-sound). 按下 (*an4 xia4* = pressing~down) it resumes organ-sound. 奇妙 (*qi2 miao4* = astonishing~wonderful)!