

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 doors



Putonghua pronunciation: *guan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwaan1*

Meanings: shut, close, imprison, mountain pass, entry-exit point, link

關 = shut/close: 關窗 (*guan1 chuang1* = shut~window), 關機 (*guan1 ji1* = shut-down-machine/computer). 關門 (*guan1 men2* = shut~door) also means closing down business/organization. PoWs 被關 (*bei4 guan1* = receive~closed-doors = are imprisoned). Parents 關心 (*guan1 xin1* = link-heart = care about) love-sick daughter trapped in 情關 (*qing2 guan1* = love's~prison/pass). Strategist grasps 關鍵 (*guan1 jian4* = entry-exit-key = crucial) moment to act. Like attacking army, researchers 闖關 (*chuang3 guan1* = charge~guarded-mountain-pass = try ambitious step to find important solution).

Businessmen need 關係 (*guan1 xi4* = joint~link = links/networking/guanxi). Drug-carrier held when 過海關 (*guo4 hai3 guan1* = go-through~sea~pass = going through customs) asserts: “與我無關!” (*yu2 wo3 wu2 guan1* = with~me~none~relationship = “I ain't involved!”)

by Diana Yue