

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 stupid search



Putonghua pronunciation: *jian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gim3*

Meanings: sword, dagger

劍 has radical 丩 (= 刀 *dao1*, knife). 劍客 (*jian4 ke4* = sword-guest = 劍俠 *jian4 xia2* = sword-knight-errant = swordsmen) wield 寶劍 (*bao3 jian4* = valuable/mighty~sword), 比劍 (*bi3 jian4* = contest~sword = fight duel/swordfight). 劍術 (*jian4 shu4* = sword~method) = swordsmanship. 劍膽琴心 (*jian4 dan3 qin2 xin1* = sword-gall-bladder~lute-heart) describes valiant hero with tender feelings.

亮劍 (*liang4 jian4* = bright/show~sword) means draw sword or exhibit military strength. 劍拔弩張 (*jian4 ba2 nu3 zhang1* = sword~drawn~crossbow~stretched) describes antagonists' military clash gestures.

Idiom 刻舟求劍 (*ke4 zhou1 qiu2 jian4* = engrave~boat~seek~sword) = using stupid rationale to pursue goal: Man's sword fell into river, he carved mark on boat, rowed back to shore and searched for sword there.

by Diana Yue