

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 gangsters

惡

Putonghua pronunciation: e4

Cantonese pronunciation: ok3

Meanings: bad, fierce, evil

惡 (radical 心 *xin1*, heart) = bad/ill-intentioned: 兇惡 (*xiong1 e4* = fierce~bad), 惡毒 (*e4 du2* = evil~poisonous). 惡霸 (*e4 ba4* = bad~bullies) are 惡人 (*e4 ren2* = fierce/bad people). 惡魔 (*e4 mo2* = evil~demons/devils) appear in 惡夢 (*e4 meng4* = bad~dreams = nightmares).

Some 惡性腫瘤 (*e4 xing4 zhong3 liu2* = bad~nature~swollen~tumor = malignant tumors/cancers) 惡化 (*e4 hua4* = bad~transform = worsen). 惡性循環 (*e4 xing4 xun2 huan2* = bad~nature~follow~rotate) = vicious circle.

Gangsters 無惡不作 (*wu2 e4 bu4 zuo4* = no~evil~not~do = commit all kinds of crimes) to expand their 惡勢力 (*e4 shi4 li4* = criminal~powers~influences). Eventually, 惡有惡報 (*e4 you3 e4 bao4* = bad~has~bad~repay = evil catches up with evil-doers).

by Diana Yue