

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 feeling good



Putonghua pronunciation: *wei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wai3*

Meanings: comfort, consolation, heart's ease, solace

慰 has radical 心 (*xin1*, heart). 慰問 (*wei4 wen4* = comfort-ask) = give condolences/greetings. Sympathizers 安慰 (*an1 wei4* = console~comfort) sufferer. Widow seeks 慰藉 (*wei4 ji2* = comfort~padding = comforting/warmth/petting). Music 撫慰 (*fu3 wei4* = stroke~comfort = soothes) tired soul.

Loser bluffs to 聊以自慰 (*liao2 yi3 zi4 wei4* = little~to~self~comfort = get some better-than-nothing self-consolation). However, 自慰 (*zi4 wei4* = self~comfort) means masturbation. Chinese and Korean 慰安婦 (*wei4 an1 fu4* = comfort~console~women = women captives long-term gang-raped in Japanese camps) seek justice against WWII Japanese invaders.

Boss throws party to 慰勞 (*wei4 lao2* = comfort~labor = thank) team's hard work. 老懷大慰 (*lao3 huai2 da4 wei4* = old~bosom/heart~big~comfort) describes senior pleased by junior/protégé's performance.

by Diana Yue