

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

(radical 金 *jin1* = gold/metal)

Putonghua pronunciation: *suo3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *soh2*

Meanings: lock, key, enchain

鎖匠 (*suo3 jiang4* = lock-smith) opens 鎖 with 鑰匙 (*yao4 shi4* = bolt-key = key). To open 數碼鎖 (*shu4 ma3 suo3* = number-code-lock = digital lock) of 夾萬 (*jia1 wan4* = clamp/squeeze-ten-thousand = safes), press 預設密碼 (*yu4 she4 mi4 ma3* = pre-set-secret-code).

鎖骨 (*suo3 gu3* = lock-bone) = collar-bone. 心鎖 (*xin1 xuo3* = heart-lock) = unbreakable emotional fixation. Marksman/squad 鎖定 (*suo3 ding4* = lock-fix = fixes on) target. 鎖國政策 (*suo3 guo2 zheng4 ce4* = lock-nation-rule-strategy = closed-door policy) produces 連鎖反應 (*lian2 suo3 fan3 ying4* = link-chain-reverse-echo = chain effects).

Slaves wear 鎖鏈 (*suo3 lian4* = locked-shackles/chains). Revolutionary masses break 枷鎖 (*jia1 suo3* = yoke-lock = oppressive constraint) of feudal system/thinking.

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