

Character Builder

您好嗎? 呀

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 eyes

盲

Putonghua pronunciation: *mang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *maang4*

Meaning: blind, blindly, muddle-headed

盲 (亡 *wang2*, death + 目 *mu4*, eye) means blind: 盲人 (*mang2 ren2* = blind-person), 盲字 (*mang2 zi4* = blind-words = Braille), 盲點 (*mang2 dian3* = blind-spot), 盲腸 (*mang2 chang2* = blind-intestine) = appendix, 盲流 (*mang2 liu2* = blind-flow) = aimless drifting crowds.

問道於盲 (*wen4 dao4 yu1 mang2* = ask-road-from-blind) is useless tactic of asking blind/ignorant person for direction/advice. 盲目 (*mang2 mu4* = blind-eye = physically blind) also describes person who 盲從 (*mang2 cong2* = blindly-follows/obeys) others or 盲動 (*mang2 dong4* = blind-move = acts/makes trouble impulsively/unwisely).

盲人騎瞎馬, 夜半臨深池 (*mang2 ren2 qi2 xia1 ma3, ye4 ban4 lin2 shen1 chi2* = blind-man-ride-blind-horse, night-middle-arrive-deep-pond) describes big blunder awaiting unaware/useless protagonist.

by Diana Yue