

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 about orchestras

銅

(radical 金 *jin1* = gold/metal)

Putonghua pronunciation: *tong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung4*

Meanings: copper, bronze, brass, brass instrument

銅 means copper/bronze/brass. 銅錢 (*tong2 qian2* = copper-money) = copper coins. 滿身銅臭 (*man3 shen1 tong2 chou4* = full~body~copper/money~stench) describes nouveau-riche's nauseating airs/ways.

青銅器 (*qing1 tong2 qi4* = green~bronze~vessel = ancient bronzes) show 銅鏽 (*tong2 xiu4* = bronze~rust). 銅牆鐵壁 (*tong2 qiang2 tie3 bi4* = bronze-wall-iron-cliff/wall) describes heavily-fortified prisons/bank-vaults.

Hunter blows 號角 (*hao4 jiao3* = call-horn = horn). 喇叭 *la1 ba1* = blurting-sound = trumpet), 短號 (*duan3 hao4* = short-horn = cornet), 大號 (*da4 hao4* = big-horn = tuba) are 銅管樂器 (*tong2 guan3 yue4 qi4* = brass-tube~music~instruments = brass instruments). 銅管樂隊 (*tong2 guan3 yue4 dui4* = brass-tube~music~team = brass band) plays 進行曲 (*jin4 xing2 qu3* = forward~walk~song = marches).

by Diana Yue