

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

指

(radical 扌 = 手 *shou3* = hand)

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji2*

Meanings: finger, point, direct, order, conduct

指 = finger: 拇指 (*mu3 zhi3* = thumb), 食指 (*shi2 zhi3* = eat~finger = second finger), 中指 (*zhong1 zhi3* = middle~finger), 無名指 (*wu2 ming2 zhi3* = no~name~finger = fourth finger), 小指 (*xiao3 zhi3* = small~finger = pinkie).

Chinese idiom “Buddha’s 五指山” (*wu3 zhi3 shan1* = five~fingers~mountain) means highest authority’s all-over control confining all devils/subjects’ movements.

Kungfu movie has 武術指導 (*wu3 shu4 zhi2 dao3* = martial-arts~director). 樂團指揮 (*yue4 tuan2 zhi3 hui1* = music~group~point~wave = orchestral conductor) waves 指揮棒 (*zhi3 hui1 bang4* = point~wave~stick = baton), gives 指示 (*zhi3 shi4* = point~show = orders/instructions), 指定 (*zhi3 ding4* = point~fix = appoints) soloists, 指點 (*zhi2 dian3* = point~dot = teaches/advises) musicians’ playing.