

Character Builder 您好學? 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 heroes

剛

Putonghua pronunciation: *gang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gong1*

Meaning: hard, brittle, strong, sturdy, upright, unbending, uncompromising

剛 (radical 丷 = 刀 *dao1*, knife) describes material/texture/personality: 剛硬 (*gang1 ying4* = strong/hard), 剛直 (*gang1 zhi2* = uncompromising-straightforward), 剛正 (*gang1 zheng4* = firm-just/fair/principled), 剛毅 (*gang1 yi4* = unbending-courageous). 外柔內剛 (*wai4 rou2 nei4 gang1* = outward-gentle-inward-hard) = gentle-looking but firm-hearted. 以柔制剛 (*yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1* = with-gentleness-control-hardness) = using soft tactics to manipulate/control powerful/stubborn opponent.

金剛鑽 (*jin1 gang1 zuan4* = gold-hard-diamond) = diamond, Buddhist deity 金剛 (*jin1 gang1* = gold-strong = Sanskrit-“vájra”) is fierce/warrior-like. In art/literature, 金剛怒目, 菩薩低眉 (*Jin1 Gang1 nu4 mu4, Pu2 Sa3 di1 mei2* = Vájra-angrily-stares, Pusa/Bodhisattva-lowers-eye-brows) describes two opposite types/attitudes: stern/condemning versus gentle/merciful. 鐵金剛 (*tie3 jin1 gang1* = iron-Vájra/warrior) is James Bond's Chinese name.

by Diana Yue