

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 children

玩

Putonghua pronunciation: *wan 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woon 6*

Meanings: play, treat frivolously

Kids 玩耍 (*wan2 shua3* = play~play = play), 玩遊戲 (*wan2 you2 xi4* = play~roam~game = play games), 貪玩 (*tan1 wan2* = greedy/love-too-much-to-play). 玩具 (*wan2 ju4* = play~instrument) = toy. Art-collectors 把玩 (*ba3 wan2* = hold~play = handle/admire) antiques. Warning “別開玩笑!” (*bie2 kai1 wan2 xiao4* = don't~open~play~laugh) = “Don't joke!”

電玩 (*dian4 wan4* = electric~play = electronic games) is new 玩意 (*wan2 yi4* = play~idea = plaything/hobby), may 玩上癮 (*wan2 shang4 yin3* = play~mount/become~addicted).

Dandies 吃喝玩樂 (*chi1 he4 wan2 le4* = eat~drink~play~joy/enjoy = lead epicurean lifestyle), 玩女人 (*wan2 nu3 ren2* = play~woman~person = treat/keep women like toys/pets). Speeding drivers 玩命 (*wan2 ming4* = play~with~life/fate = are playing with death).

by Diana Yue