

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 borrowing arrows

Putonghua pronunciation: *jian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jin3*

Meanings: arrow

Archer uses 弓箭 (*gong1 jian* = bow~arrow), aims at 箭靶 (*jian4 ba3* = arrow~target/mark). Enemy fears 毒箭 (*du2 jian4* = poisoned~arrow), 放冷箭 (*fang4 leng3 jian4* = send~cold~arrow = sudden/unexpected shot/attack).

In signage, 箭頭 (*jian4 tou2* = arrow~head) indicates direction. 箭步 (*jian4 bu4* = arrow~step) = step/dart forward. 箭豬 (*jian4 zhu1* = arrow~pig) = hedgehog/porcupine. 太空火箭 (*tai4 kong1 huo3 jian4* = ultimate~void~fire~arrow) = space rocket. 萬箭穿心 (*wan4 jian4 chuan1 xin1* = ten-thousand~arrows~pierce~heart) describes truly hurting grief.

蜀 (*Shu2*) Kingdom and 吳 (*Wu2*) Kingdom have assembled battleships. Big battle against 魏 (*Wei4*) Kingdom 如箭在弦 (*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2* = resemble~arrow~on~bow-string), 不得不發 (*bu4 de2 bu4 fa1* = no~allow~no~go = must go ahead).