

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 leisure

閒

Putonghua pronunciation: *xian2*
Cantonese pronunciation: *haan4*
Meanings: leisure, idle

閒 (= 閑 (*xian2*) means leisure/idleness. 閒 shows月 (*yue4*, moon) seen through 門 (*men2*, doors). 閑 shows木 (*mu4*, wood/trees) seen through 門 (*men2*, doors).

Loafers 游手好閒 (*you2 shou3 hao4 xian2* = swim/swing~arms~enjoy~leisure). Chatterboxes 說閒話 (*shuo1 xian2 hua4* = talk~idle~speech = make gossip), 管人閒事 (*guan3 ren2 xian2 shi4* = control~people's~idle~affairs = poke into other people's affairs).

At coffee-break we 忙裡偷閒 (*mang2 li3 tou1 xian2* = busy~amidst~steal~leisure = grab some free time), 閒談 (*xian2 tan2* = leisurely~talk/chat). 休閒服 (*xiu1 xian2 fu2* = rest~leisure~clothes) = off-work/casual-wear. 閒雲野鶴 (*xian2 yun2 ye3 he4* = leisurely~cloud~wild~crane = unengaged person enjoying freedom) feels 閒情逸致 (*xian2 qing2 yi4 zhi4* = leisure~feelings~free~sentiments = mood for relaxation/fun).