

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 auctions

拍

Putonghua pronunciation: *pai1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *paak3*

Meanings: pat, hit, bang, auction

拍 (radical 扌 = 手, hand/arm) = beat with hand/palm. 拍門 (*pai1 men2* = rap-on~door), 拍手 (*pai1 shou3* = pat~hands = clap/applaud), 拍照 (*pai1 zhao4* = hit-shutter-light-up = take photo).

節拍 (*jie2 pai1* = bar~beat) = musical beat/rhythm. Pals who 合拍 (*he2 pai1* = match~beat = get along well) become 拍檔 (*pai1 dang4* = match~stall = working partners). 一拍兩散 (*yi1 pai1 liang3 san4* = one~bang~two~split-up) = partners' row, split-up.

拍案 (*pai1 an4*) = 拍桌子 (*pai1 zhuo1 zi0* = hit~table~diminutive) = pound on table, usually in surprise/anger. 拍賣官 (*pai1 mai4 guan1* = bang~sell~official = auctioneers) conduct 拍賣 (*pai1 mai4* = bang~sell = auction sales) for 拍賣行 (*pai1 mai4 hang2* = auction~hong/houses).