

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 doors

開

(radical 門 *men2* = door)

Putonghua pronunciation: *kai1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hoi1*

Meanings: open, begin, steer

開 means open: 開門 (*kai1 men2* = open-door), 開口 (*kai1 kou3* = open-mouth = talk). 開始 (*kai1 shi3* = open-begin) = begin. 開車 (*kai1 che1* = open-car) = start/drive car.

Employee who 開罪 (*kai1 zui4* = open-sin/offence = offended) boss gets 開除 (*kai1 chu2* = open-eliminate = fired). Seeing slow-witted child 開竅 (*kai1 qiao4* = open-holes = grow intelligent), parents 開心 (*kai1 xin1* = open-heart = feel happy), say “天開眼!” (*tian1 kai1 yan3* = sky/heaven~open-eyes = “Heaven watches, and cares!”)

The Creator 開天闢地 (*kai1 tian1 pi4 di4* = open-sky/heaven-clear-land = created heaven and earth). Deng Xiaoping led 改革開放 (*gai3 ge2 kai1 fang4* = change-reform~open-release = reforms and opening up) of China.