

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 World Expo

擠

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jai1*

Meanings: squeeze, cram

擠 = 扌 (= 手 *shou3*, hand) + 齊 (*qi2*, together). Verb 擠 = press/squeeze/crowd: 擠奶 (*ji3 nai3* = squeeze~milk) from cow's udder, 擠公車 (*ji3 gong1 che1* = squeeze~public~car = cram into bus).

Adjective 擠 = 擠擁 (*ji3 yong1* = cram~embrace) = crowded. 公路擠塞 (*gong1 lu4 ji3 sai1* = public~road~squeeze~jam = highway crowded) causes 堵車 (*du3 che1* = jam~car = traffic jam).

Visitors 擠滿 (*ji3 man3* = crowd~full = fill up) Shanghai Expo site. Police exercise 人群管理 (*ren2 qun2 guan3 li3* = person~crowd~control~arrange = crowd control). Visitors 排隊 (*pai2 dui4* = arrange~row = form queues) outside pavilions, 秩序井然 (*zhi4 xu4 jing3 ran2* = class~order~water~well~certainly = follow strict order, like wells neatly spaced out).