

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 Halloween

怪

Putonghua pronunciation: *guai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwaai3*

Meanings: odd, strange, weird, bizarre, grotesque, ridiculous, monster

怪 = 奇怪 (*qi2 guai4* = strange-odd): 怪人 (*guai4 ren2* = eccentric~fellow), 怪事 (*guai4 shi4* = strange-occurrence), 怪癖 (*guai4 pi* = queer/cranky~habit). 怪傑 (*guai4 jie2* = eccentric~hero) = brilliant person having eccentric style/vision or uncommon success profile.

Tabloids spread 奇談怪論 (*qi2 tan2 guai4 lun4* = strange~talk~odd~opinion = ridiculous stories/comments). 光怪陸離 (*guang1 guai4 lu4 li2* = bright~strange~motley~odd) describes eye-dazzling/shocking outfits/decor or bizarre happenings.

怪物 (*guai4 wu4* = strange~object) = monster. When 怪風 (*guai4 feng1* = eerie~wind) blows, 尼斯湖怪 (*Ni2 Si1 hu2 guai4* = “Ness”-transliterated-lake~monster = Loch Ness monster) appears. Ghost stories describe how 妖魔鬼怪 (*yao1 mo2 gui3 guai4* = demons~devils~ghosts~monsters) 作怪 (*zuo2 guai1* = do~strange = disturb/harm people).