

Character Builder 您好嗎? 咳

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 about orchestras

敲

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haau1*

Meanings: hit, knock, beat, percussion instrument

敲 = 敲打 (hit~beat): 敲門 (*qiao1 men2* = knock-on~door), 敲詐 (*qiao1 zha4* = beat~deceive = extortion/blackmailing).

鑼 (*luo2*, gongs), 鈸 (*ba2*, cymbals), 鼓 (*gu3*, drums), 三角 (*san1 jiao3* = three~corners = triangles), 木琴 (*mu4 qin2* = wood~lyre = xylophones), ancient Chinese 編鐘 (*bian1 zhong1* = arrange~bell = set of bells/chimes) are 敲打樂器 (*qiao1 da3 yue4 qi4* = hit~beat~music~instrument = percussion instruments). In 秧歌 (*yang1 ge1* = young~padi~shoot~song = northern Shaanxi Province folkdance), dancers beat 腰鼓 (*yao1 gu3* = waist~drum = drums hung from waist).

旁敲側擊 (*pang2 qiao1 ze4 ji1* = side~hit~aside~beat) means asking tacit/oblique questions to tap information. 敲山震虎 (*qiao1 shan1 zhen4 hu3* = beat~mountain~shake~tiger) means launching attack to warn/intimidate enemy.