

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

萬

Putonghua pronunciation: *wan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *maan6*

Meanings: ten thousand, many, innumerable

萬 = 10,000. 百萬富翁 (*bai2 wan4 fu4 weng1* = hundred-10,000~rich~old-man) = millionaire. 億 (*yi4*) = 一萬萬 (*yi1 wan4 wan4* = one~10,000~10,000 = 0.1 billion).

萬 also means all/innumerable: 萬物 (*wan4 wu4* = 10,000~things = all creation), 萬能 (*wan4 neng2* = 10,000~able = omnipotent), 萬里長征 (*wan4 li3 chang2 zheng1* = 10,000~miles~long~march). We wish friend 萬事如意 (*wan4 shi4 ru2 yi4* = 10,000~things/events~resemble~wish = success/joy in everything). Emperor's title 萬歲 (*wan4 sui4* = 10,000~years/age) also means "Hurrah!" War kills 千萬生靈 (*qian1 wan4 sheng1 ling2* = thousand~10,000~living~souls = countless lives).

Christians observe 萬聖節 (*wan4 sheng4 jie2* = 10,000~holy/saint~festival = All Saints Day), 萬靈節 (*wan4 ling2 jie2* = 10,000~spirit/soul~festival = All Souls Day).

by Diana Yue