

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 furniture

適

Putonghua pronunciation: *shì*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sik1*

Meaning: fit, proper, suitable, moderate, proper, comfortable, leisurely

適 (radical 辵 *chuo4*, walk) = 適合 (*shì hé2* = suit-fit/proper), 適宜 (*shì yí2* = fit/suitable-recommendable). 適中 (*shì zhōng1* = fit-middle) = middle-range/acceptable. 適齡 (*shì líng2* = suitable-age) = in right age-bracket for school/marriage etc.

庭院桌椅 (*ting2 yuán4 zuo1 yǐ3* = court-yard-tables-chairs = patio furniture) has 舒適 (*shū shì* = relaxed-comfortable), 閒適 (*xián2 shì* = leisurely-comfortable) feel. 不適 (*bù shì* = not-comfortable = ill/sick) person needs 適當 (*shì dāng4* = suitable-proper) nursing.

Housewife 適應 (*shì yīng4* = suit-respond = adapts to) downsized apartment, cuts 家具 (*jiā jù4* = home-furniture) to 適量 (*shì liang4* = suitable-amount). Designer advises: “適可而止!” (*shì kě3 ér2 zhǐ3* = just-right-acceptable-and-stop = “That’s enough, don’t overdo it!”)

by Diana Yue