

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 political parties



Putonghua pronunciation: *tong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung4*

Meanings: converge, share, together, same

同 = 共同 (*gong4 tong2* = share~same = similarly/sharing). 同時 (*tong2 shi2* = same~time) = simultaneous. 同樣 (*tong2 yang4* = same~appearance) = similar-looking/equally. 同情心 (*tong2 qing2 xin1* = share~feeling~heart) = sympathy.

同學 (*tong2 xue2* = together~study) = classmate. 同事 (*tong2 shi4* = share~matters/work) = colleague. 同袍 (*tong2 pao2* = same~robe/uniform) = fellow-soldier/policeman. 同胞 (*tong2 bao1* = same~cell) = compatriot. 同黨 (*tong2 dang3* = same~gang) = accomplice. 同志 (*tong2 zhi4* = same~aspiration) means comrades or 同性戀者 (*tong2 xing4 lian3 zhe3* = same-sex-love~person = homosexual/lesbian).

同舟共濟 (*tong2 zhou1 gong4 ji4* = same~boat~together~aid) describes distressed people helping each other. Idealists preach 世界大同 (*shi4 jie4 da4 tong2* = world~territory~big~same = universal equality).