

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 National Day



Putonghua pronunciation: *zhong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jung1*

Meaning: truthful, devoted, dedicated, faithful, loyal, patriotic

忠 (中 *zhong1*, center + 心 *xin1*, heart) means 忠心 (*zhong1 xin1* = devoted-heart/will): 忠實 (*zhong1 shi2* = faithful-truthful) description, 忠誠 (*zhong4 cheng2* = devoted-honest/sincere) comrade. 忠僕 (*zhong4 pu2* = loyal-servant) 盡忠職守 (*jin4 zhong1 zhi1 shou3* = all-devoted-to-post-morals = performs all duties/missions).

不忠 (*bu4 zhong1* = un-faithful) husband ignores friend's 忠厚 (*zhong1 hou4* = honest-thick/considerate = honest/kind) advice. Often, 忠言逆耳 (*zhong1 yan2 ni4 er3* = honest/frank-words/admonitions-grate-against-ear).

忠貞 (*zhong1 zhen1* = loyal-chaste/faithful) subjects 忠於 (*zhong1 yu1* = remain loyal-to) country. Confucianism praises 忠孝 (*zhong1 xiao4* = loyalty-filial-piety), 忠義 (*zhong1 yi4* = patriotism-integrity). But some 忠臣 (*zhong1 chen2* = loyal-ministers/subjects) are just 愚忠 (*yu2 zhong1* = foolishly-loyal to undeserving leader).

by Diana Yue