

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:

- 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 foreign maids

待

Putonghua pronunciation: *dai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *doi6*

Meanings: wait, wait on, attend, tend to, treat, treatment

待 (radical 彳 *chi4*, as in 彳亍 *chi4 chu4* = walking slowly and pausing) means 等待 (*deng3 dai4* = wait-waiting): 久待 (*jiu3 dai4* = long-awaiting), 苦待 (*ku3 dai4* = miserably-waiting), 不待 (*bu4 dai4* = won't-wait, will act). 待業 (*dai4 ye4* = waiting-for-employment) = unemployed.

Hotel staff 款待 (*kuan3 dai4* = sincerely/friendlyly-wait-on = receives/attends to) guests, demonstrate 待客之道 (*dai4 ke4 zhi1 dao4* = receive/treat-guests-'s-way = rules/ways of showing hospitality), won't 冷待 (*leng3 dai4* = coldly-treat = neglect) anyone. Well-bred person 待人接物 (*dai4 ren2 jie2 wu4* = treats-people-handles-things/situations) sensibly.

待遇 (*dai4 yu4* = treatment-reception) = employee's remunerations package. 厚待 (*hou4 dai4* = thick-treat) = good/generous pay/treatment. 薄待 (*bo2 dai4* = thin-treat) = bad/stingy pay/treatment.

by Diana Yue