

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 contracts

限

Putonghua pronunciation: *xian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haan6*

Meaning: limit, restrict, prescribe limit, norm, quota, separate, cut off

限 (radical 阝 = 阜 *fu4*, hill) means 限制 (*xian4 zhi4* = limit-control = imposing limits). Parents 限定 (*xian4 ding4* = limit-determine) kids' bedtime, won't 寬限 (*kuan1 xian4* = relax-limit). School sets 限額 (*xian4 e2* = limiting-amount = quota) on intake. Frozen foods have 期限 (*qi1 xian4* = time-period-limit = deadline for consumption).

有限公司 (*you3 xian4 gong1 si1* = has-limit-public-bureau = limited company) defines directors' 權限 (*quan2 xian4* = powers-and-limitations). Bonuses have 上限 (*shang4 xian4* = upper-most-limit). Employees' wages have 下限 (*xia4 xian4* = lowest-limit), cannot exceed 極限 (*ji2 xian4* = ultimate-limit).

Prodigy has 無限 (*wu2 xian4* = un-limited, infinite) talent/imagination, future 無可限量 (*wu2 ke3 xian4 liang4* = no-can-limit-volume = has immense prospects).

by Diana Yue