

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 promotion

勤

Putonghua pronunciation: *qin2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kan4*

Meanings: attendance, diligent, frequently

勤 (radical力 *li4*, strength) = 勤勞 (*qin2 lao2* = diligently~labor/toil). Bees 勤採蜜 (*qin2 cai3 mi4* = diligently~pick~flowers-for-honey). Lazy-bone 四體不勤 (*si4 ti3 bu4 qin2* = four~bodies/limbs~no~diligent = doesn't move body at all). Housewife 勤儉持家 (*qin2 jian4 chi2 jia1* = diligently~frugally~manages~household).

A-student 勤奮讀書 (*qin2 fen4 du2 shu1* = diligently~keenly~reads/studies~books). Employee 值勤 (*zhi2 qin2* = attends-to~shift-duties), does 後勤 (*hou4 qin2* = back-up~diligent = odd jobs). Loyalist army 勤王 (*qin2 wang2* = attend/support~king = fights to defend king).

In early 20th century, young Chinese communists 周恩來 (*Zhou1 En1 Lai2*), 鄧小平 (Deng4 Xiao3 Ping2) etc. studied in Europe on government-funded 勤工儉學 (*qin2 gong1 jian4 xue2* = diligent~work~frugal~study = work-study) program.

by Diana Yue