

Character Builder

您好學？

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 tenants

客

Putonghua pronunciation: *ke4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haak3*

Meaning: away from home, guest, visitor, stranger, person engaged in activity

客 (radical 宀 *mian2*, house) = 客人 (*ke4 ren2* = guest/visiting-person). 租客 (*zu1 ke4* = rent-guest/person) = tenant. 乘客 (*cheng2 ke4* = ride-guest = passengers), 顧客 (*gu4 ke4* = look-guest = customers/clients), 住客 (*zhu4 ke4* = residing-guests/persons) expect 客氣 (*ke4 qi4* = guest-air/style = polite) service. 客觀 (*ke4 guan1* = guest's-view) = objective.

酒客 (*jiu3 ke4* = liquor-person) = drinker/boozier in pub. 嫖客 (*piao2 ke4* = wench-er) visits brothels. 政客 (*zheng4 ke4* = politicians) pays 說客 (*shuo1 ke4* = say/persuade-person = lobbyists), 刺客 (*ci4 ke4* = stab-person = assassins).

客家 (*ke4 jia1* = guest-family = Hakka) people's ancestors migrated here from northern China. Old-age expatriate 客死異鄉 (*ke4 si3 yi4 xiang1* = away-from-home-dies-in-foreign-land).

by Diana Yue