

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 water



Putonghua pronunciation: *ji4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jai3*

Meanings: cross river, aid, help, relief, achieve, effective

Water (= H²O: 氫 *qing1*, hydrogen + 氧 *yang3*, oxygen) sustains life. 濟 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3* + 齊 *qi2*, together) means regulating/crossing water or effectively distributing help, e.g. 濟貧 (*ji4 pin2* = giving-aid-to~the-poor).

同舟共濟 (*tong2 zhou1 gong4 ji4* = same~boat-together~cross/help) describes ill-fated people helping each other. 共濟會 (*gong4 ji4 hui4* = together~help~ society) is the Masonic Society's Chinese name.

Indeed, 流水不腐, 戶樞不蠹 (*liu2 shui3 bu4 fu3, hu4 shu1 bu2 du4* = flowing~water~doesn't-go-bad, door's~hinge~doesn't-get-eaten-by-worms): remaining active puts off things' decay/crumbling. But if 經濟 (*jing1 ji4* = plan~distribute-help = the economy) is 不濟 (*bu4 ji4* = not-effective = weak), job-hunting is 無濟於事 (*wu2 ji4 yu1 shi4* = no-help~to~issue = useless).