

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 tenants

按

Putonghua pronunciation: *an4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *on3*

Meaning: press, mortgage, following, according to

按 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means press hand or lay claim on something: 按門鈴 (*an4 men2 ling2* = press-door-bell), 按鈕 (*an4 niu3* = press-button), 按鍵 (*an4 jian4* = press-key), 按金 (*an4 jin1* = claim/deposit-money/sum). Patient lets doctor 按脈 (*an4 mai4* = press/feel-pulse). 按摩 (*an4 mo2* = press-feel/rub) = massage.

按 means 按照 (*an4 zhao4* = according-to-copy/follow): 按時 (*an4 shi2* = regularly following-time-table), 按理 (*an4 li3* = follow-reason = logically-speaking). Team 按部就班 (*an4 bu4 jiu4 ban1* = follow-steps-according-to-stage/schedule), completes project.

Anticipating market plunge, potential home-buyers 按兵不動 (*an4 bing1 bu4 dong4* = hold-army-no-move = won't take action), prefer 按月付租 (*an4 yue4 fu4 zu1* = follow-month-pay-rent = paying rent every month).