

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 natural harmony

Putonghua pronunciation: *tian1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tin1*

Meaning: sky, heaven, heavenly, serene, nature, day, ultimate authority

天 (strokes sheltering 人 *ren2*, man) means 天空 (*tian1 kong1* = sky's-void/space = sky). Clouds in 天上 (*tian1 shang4* = sky/heavens-above) affect 天氣 (*tian1 qi4* = sky's-breath = the weather). Ancient Chinese 拜天 (*bai4 tian1* = worshipped-Heaven). 天子 (*tian1 zi3* = Heaven's-son having Heaven's mandate = emperor) ruled 天下 (*tian1 xia4* = sky/heaven-under = the world).

天生 (*tian1 sheng1* = heaven-born) = born with, natural. Simple-minded people are 天真 (*tian1 zhen1* = heaven/nature-true/sincere = innocent/naïve). 天才 (*tian1 cai2* = heaven-sent-talent) = genius.

Sage advises: Follow your 天良 (*tian1 liang2* = nature-bestowed-conscience), respect 天地萬物 (*tian1 di4 wan4 wu4* = heaven-earth-ten-thousand-things = the world and all things in it). Don't defy 天理 (*tian1 li3* = natural-reason/law/justice).

by Diana Yue