

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 younger generation

Putonghua pronunciation: *ji 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gai 3*

Meanings: continue, succeed, successive

In character 繼, radical 纟 (= 絲 *si1*, silk/thread) suggests succession/continuation. Widower takes 繼室 (*ji4 shi1* = succeed-room = next wife after deceased wife). 繼父繼母 (*ji4 fu4 ji4 mu3* = succeed-father~succeed-mother) = step-parents. “繼續!” (*ji4 xu2* = succeed~link/extend = continue) means “Go/carry on!” 後勁不繼 (*hou4 jing4 bu4 ji4* = final-strength-not/unable~continue) describes runners/competitors dropping behind in the final lap.

遺囑 (*yi2 zhu3* = deceased/leave-reminding-words = deceased 掇 will) names 繼承人 (*ji4 cheng2 ren2* = succeed~receive~person = heir) to 繼承 (*ji4 cheng2* = succeed~receive = inherit) deceased's estate. Crown prince 繼位 (*ji4 wei4* = succeed-seat = succeeds the throne). Great rulers/thinkers 繼往開來 (*ji4 wang3 kai1 lai2* = inherit~past~open/develop~coming = expand predecessors' territories/intellectual premises).