

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 talents

才

Putonghua pronunciation: *cai 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *choi 4*

Meanings: talent, talented person

Adverb 才 means “only then did ...”. Noun 才 = 才能 (*cai neng 22* = talent~ability). Mozart was a 天才 (*tian cai 12* = heaven~talent = genius). Actors/actresses need 才華 (*cai hua 22* = talent/flair). Stand-up comedians need 急才 (*ji cai 22* = urgent-talent = quick wits). 庸才 (*yong cai 12* = ordinary~talent) = mediocre worker. “蠢才!” (*chun cai 32* = stupid~talent) means “Fool!”

Good rulers/bosses 憐才 (*lian cai 22* = pity/care-for~talents = like/appreciate talented people), 貯才 (*zhu cai 42* = hoard~talent = keep talent pools). Bad/mean leaders 忌才 (*ji cai 42* = fear/dislike~talent).

Romance stories praise 才子佳人 (*cai zi jia ren 2312* = talent~son/ man~fine~person = talented scholar and beautiful woman = a fine/compatible/enviable pair).