

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 making selections

優

Putonghua pronunciation: *you1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yau1*

Meaning: abundant, excellent, best, fine, advantaged

優 (radical 亻 = 人 *ren2*, person/human) means good/outstanding: 優點 (*you1 dian3* = good-points), 優勢 (*you1 shi4* = good/strong-position = advantage), 優待 (*you1 dai4* = preferential-treatment). 優秀 (*you1 xiu4* = fine-outstanding) singer has 優美 (*you1 mei3* = fine-beautiful) voice, 優雅 (*you1 ya3* = fine-elegant) airs.

優質 (*you1 zhi4* = good-quality) education produces 優等生 (*you1 deng3 sheng1* = top-grade-students). 優裕 (*you1 yu4* = fine/abundant-affluent = affluent) living requires 優厚 (*you1 hou4* = good-thick = good) income.

優良常可劣 (*you1 liang2 chang2 ke3 lie4* = excellent-good-common-passable-poor) is five-tier grading. In competition, 優勝劣敗 (*you1 sheng4 lie4 bai4* = strong-candidates-win-poor-candidates-lose). Proud winner develops 優越感 (*you1 yue4 gan3* = good-surpass-feeling = sense of superiority).

by Diana Yue