

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 reunion gatherings

Putonghua pronunciation: *ren4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ying6*

Meanings: know, identify, recognize, acknowledge, accept

認 (radical 言 *yan2*, words) = 認識 (*ren4 shi1* = identify-know = know/understand). Drivers must 認路 (*ren4 lu4* = identify~road = know the way). Kids learn to 認字 (*ren4 zi4* = identify/recognize~characters/words). Witness examines suspects to 認人 (*ren4 ren2* = identify~person = identify the culprit).

Beaten candidate 認輸 (*ren4 shu4* = admits~defeat), 承認 (*cheng2 ren4* = accept~admit) opponent's superiority. Embezzler stole money but 不認賬 (*bu4 ren4 zhang4* = no~admit~accounts = won't admit it). Traitor 認賊作父 (*ren4 zei2 zuo4 fu4* = acknowledge~thief/villain~as~father = accepts/serves villain as lord/protector).

Lonely guy wants to 認識朋友 (*ren4 shi1 peng2 you3* = identify~know~peer~friend = know people, make friends). Estranged friends finally 相認 (*xiang1 ren4* = mutual-identify = recognize/claim each other).

by Diana Yue