

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: *yī, yāo1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yat1*

Meaning: one, first, single, all, everything, united, equal, absolute

一, one stroke, means one/single/all: 一人 (*yī ren2* = a/one-person), 第一 (*dì yī* = number-one = first). Scholar 無一不知 (*wú yī bù zhī* = not-one-not-know = knows everything). This column teaches 一日一字 (*yī rì yī zì* = one-day-one-word = a word a day).

Bride-and-groom vow 一生專一 (*yī shēng zhuān yī* = whole-life-concentrated-on-one = lifelong fidelity). In meditation, heart/mind and universe/nature 合而為一 (*hé ér wéi yī* = blend-and-become-one). Christians worship 唯一 (*wéi yī* = the only-one) God.

Buddhists say: 一花一世界, 一葉一如來 (*yī huā yī shì jiè, yī yè yī rú lái* = one-flower-one-world, one-leaf-one-Buddha = A flower is/contains a world/cosmo, a leaf is/contains Buddha's presence/wisdom).