

Character Builder 您好學? 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 making selections

慎

Putonghua pronunciation: *shen4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *san6*

Meaning: careful, prudent, cautious

慎 (radical ↑ = 心 *shen1*, heart + 真 *zhen1*, true/real) = 慎重 (*shen4 zhong4* = careful/prudent-serious). Decision-makers are 審慎 (*shen3 shen4* = wary/examine-prudent = warily cautious). Pedestrian neglects “慎防碎石” (*shen4 fang2 sui4 shi2* = careful-guard-broken-stone = “Beware of gravel”) sign, 不慎跌倒 (*bu4 shen4 die1 dao3* = not-careful-fall-down = carelessly trips over).

Scientist 思想慎密 (*si1 xiang3 shen4 mi4* = thought-idea-cautious-tight = is well-organized/metropolitan in thinking). Scary person 謹小慎微 (*jin3 xiao3 shen4 wei1* = prudent-small-cautious-tiny = checks himself on minor issues/details).

Sage advocates 慎言 (*shen4 yan2* = prudent-language/speech), 慎行 (*shen4 xing2* = prudent-behavior/actions), warns law-breakers: “慎之, 慎之!” (*shen4 zhi4! shen4 zhi!* = Be careful, think twice!