

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 faith

信

Putonghua pronunciation: *xin4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sun3*

Meaning: believe, faith, conviction, faithful, reliable, honest, trust, trustworthy, confident

信 (亻 = *ren2*, person + 言 *yan2*, word) means message/letter or 相信 (*xiang1 xin4* = mutual-believe = believe): 信賴 (*xin4 lai4* = trust-and-rely-on), 深信 (*shen1 xin4* = deeply-convicted), 輕信 (*qing1 xin4* = lightly/carelessly/foolishly-believe). 自信 (*zi4 xin4* = self-trust) = self-confidence.

Gentleman 言而有信 (*yan2 er2 you3 xin4* = speak-and-has/keeps-faithfulness = gives his word, honours it). Politician stresses his 誠信 (*cheng2 xin4* = honesty-trustworthiness). Businessman seeks 可信 (*ke3 xin4* = can-believe = reliable) partner with 信用 (*xin4 yong4* = trust-use = credibility).

信徒 (*xin4 tu2* = faithful-disciples/believers) uphold 信仰 (*xin4 yang3* = believe-raise-head = belief/tenet/faith). 聖保羅 (*Sheng4 Bao3 Luo2* = St. "Paul"-transliterated) named three Christian virtues: 信望愛 (*xin4 wang4 ai4* = faith-hope-charity/love).

by Diana Yue