

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 practice

Putonghua pronunciation: *heng2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hang4*

Meanings: steady, constant, steadfast, long-lasting, persevering, permanent

恆 (亻 = 心 *xin1*, heart + 亘 *gen4*, long-enduring) describes person/thing's steady condition/willpower. Country preserves 恆久 (*heng2 jiu3* = steady~long = long-enduring) customs. Romeo promises 永恆 (*yong3 heng2* = forever~steady = eternal) love. 恆星 (*heng2 xing1* = steady/fixed~star = stars) populate cosmos.

Lab maintains 恆溫 (*heng2 wen1* = constant~temperature). 恆齒 (*heng2 ci3* = permanent teeth) last a life-time. 恆河 (*Heng2 He2* = long-lasting~river) is Chinese name of India's Ganges River. 家無恆產 (*jia1 wu2 heng2 can3* = family/home~has-no~steady~assets) describes poor/threadbare existence.

Practice requires 恆心 (*heng2 xin1* = steady/long-lasting~heart = perseverance), 耐性 (*nai4 xing4* = wait/endure~nature = patience). Sage encourages hardworking youngster: 持之以恆 (*chi2 zhi1 yi3 heng2* = hold-it-with~perseverance = "Continue steadfastly, don't give up!")

by Diana Yue