

# 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 self-improvement

格

Putonghua pronunciation: *ge2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaak3*

Meaning: square, check, grid, quality, standard, contend, reason

格 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood/tree + 各 *ge2*, +-shape) means 方格 (*fang1 ge2* = square-square), 資格 (*zhi1 ge2* = quality-standard), 格式 (*ge2 shi1* = standard-format). Student 合格 (*he2 ge2* = match-standard = passes-test/qualifies). Prolific Chinese writers 爬格子 (*pa2 ge2 zi3* = climb-squares-diminutive = fill grid-printed manuscript paper with Chinese characters).

Artists having 性格 (*xing4 ge2* = nature-standard = character) create works with 風格 (*feng2 ge2* = wind-standard = style). Music/poetry follows 格律 (*ge2 lü4* = standards-laws = prosody).

Confucianism proposes 格物 (*ge2 wu4* = contend-matter = applying reason/analysis to things) as basis of acquiring knowledge. Sage quotes 格言 (*ge2 yan2* = standard-saying = maxims), stresses importance of 人格 (*ren2 ge2* = person's-style = personal integrity).

by Diana Yue