

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 self-improvement

致

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji3*

Meaning: send, reach, deliver, give, devote, cause, extent

致 (radical 至 *zhi4*, arrive) means give/send. Donor 致詞 (*zhi4 ci2* = delivers-speech). Recipients 致謝 (*zhi4 xie4* = convey/express-thanks). Soldiers salute to 致敬 (*zhi4 jing4* = convey-respect/admiration).

致 also means cause/extent. 致命 (*zhi4 ming4* = cause-death = fatal) disease spreads, 致使 (*zhi4 shi3* = causes-makes) people scared, but 不致於 (*bu4 zhi4* = not-to-the-extent-of) panic. Soprano's 精緻 (*jing1 zhi4* = delicate-extent = fine) interpretation elevates aria's beauty to 極致 (*ji2 zhi4* = ultimate-level).

Businessmen study 致富之道 (*zhi4 fu4 zhi1 dao4* = become-rich-'s-way = way to amass fortune). Confucian sage 致力 (*zhi4 li4* = devotes-efforts to) promote self-learning: 格物 (*ge2 wu4* = contend-matter = applying reason/analysis to things) is basis of 致知 (*zhi4 zhi1* = attaining-knowledge).

by Diana Yue