

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

嚴

Putonghua pronunciation: *yan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yim4*

Meaning: strict, stern, un-relaxed, harsh, serious

嚴 = stern/serious: 嚴重 (*yan2 zhong4* = serious-weighty/big) problem, 嚴密 (*yan2 mi4* = strict-tight) organization, 嚴格 (*yan2 ge2* = strict-rigorous) training, 嚴厲 (*yan2 li4* = harsh-fierce) condemnation, 嚴冬 (*yan2 dong1* = harsh-winter), 嚴刑 (*yan2 xing2* = strict/harsh-penalties), 嚴父 (*yan2 fu4* = stern-father).

Confucianism advocates 嚴謹 (*yan2 jin3* = serious-cautious/meticulous) ethics: 格物 (*ge2 wu4* = analyse-things), 致知 (*zhi4 zhi1* = attain-knowledge), 誠意 (*cheng2 yi4* = maintain-honest-intent), 正心 (*zheng4 xin1* = keep-unbiased-mind), 修身 (*xiu1 shen1* = cultivate-personal-morals), 齊家 (*qi2 jia1* = maintain-order/harmony-in-family), 治國 (*zhi4 guo2* = govern-country), 平天下 (*ping2 tian1 xia4* = keep-peace-in-all-land-under-heaven).

嚴肅 (*yan2 su4* = serious-principled) person 律己以嚴 (*li4 ji3 yi3 yan2* = regulates-him/herself-with-strictness = keeps strict self-discipline).

by Diana Yue