

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 filial piety

德

Putonghua pronunciation: *de2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dak1*

Meanings: virtue, morality

Character 德 = 彳 (= 行 *xing2*, walk/act) + 直 (= 值 *zhi2*, value) + 心 (*xin1*, heart), hence 德 means virtuous/kind heart/action. Ancient philosopher Lao-zi wrote 道德經 (*dao4 de2 jing1* = way-virtue-classic = Dao De Jing, classic of Daoism). Confucians preach 仁義道德 (*ren2 yi4 dao4 de2* = benevolence-integrity-way-virtue = benevolence, righteousness, morality).

Filial piety is 美德 (*mei3 de2* = beautiful/praiseworthy-virtue). Helping/consoling others is 德行 (*de2 xing2* = virtuous-act). Cheats/peepers/gossipers are 缺德 (*que4 de2* = lack-moral = immoral/bad).

Buddhist/Daoist priests 做功德 (*zuo4 gong1 de2* = do/make-achievement-benevolence = perform religious rituals to boost clients' fortune). Accepting an appointment, we say modestly/pretentiously: 何德何能! (*he2 de2 he2 neng2* = how-virtuous-how-able = I'm not good/qualified enough for this!)

by Diana Yue