

Character Builder

您好學? 敬

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 old people

敬

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging3*

Meanings: respect, treat courteously

敬 (radical 支 pu1, rap/tap) = sentiment/act of 尊敬 (*zun1 jing4* = honor-respect): 敬畏 (*jing4 wei4* = respect-fear/awe), 敬愛 (*jing4 ai4* = respect-love/endearment), 恭敬 (*gong1 jing4* = courteous-respectful), 敬酒 (*jing4 jiu3* = respectfully-offer- wine). 敬語 (*jing4 yu3* = respect-word/term) means honorific: “您老” (*ning2 lao3* = you-old) is courteous/respectful form of address.

Petty oldies expect 敬老 (*jing4 lao3* = respect-for-the-elderly), say youngsters who don't 讓座 (*rang4 zuo4* = give/yield seat) to elderly are 不敬 (*bu4 jing4* = not-respectful = rude).

Actually, youngsters 敬佩 (*jing4 pei4* = respect-admire/adore) oldies who are 老當益壯 (*lao3 dang1 yi1 zhuang4* = old-should-be-even-more-strong = old yet strong/healthy), 老練 (*lao3 lian4* = old-polished/experienced), 老辣 (*lao3 la4* = old-spicy-hot = tough).

by Diana Yue