

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 making friends

知

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji1*

Meanings: know, understand

Ideogram 知 (矢 *chi3*, arrow + 口 *kou3*, mouth) symbolizes speedily/orally-conveyed information/knowledge. 知道 (*zhi1 dao4* = know-the-way) = know. 知識 (*zhi1 shi1* = know-identify = knowledge). 無知 (*wu2 zhi1* = no-know) = ignorant. 良知 (*liang2 zhi1* = good/kind-know) = conscience.

知心友 (*zhi1 xin1 you3* = know-heart-friend) = bosom pal. 相知甚深 (*xiang1 zhi1 shen4 shen1* = mutual-know-quite-deep) describes two/several people sharing deep mutual understanding and friendship.

Grateful for 知遇之恩 (*zhi1 yu4 zhi1 en1* = know-treat-'s-kindness = understanding/appreciation and kind treatment), 士為知己者死 (*shi4 wei4 zhi1 ji3 zhe2 si3* = man-for-know-self-person-die = man dies for friend/benefactor who understands/appreciates him). 紅顏知己 (*hong2 yan2 zhi1 ji3* = red-visage-know-self) = intimate girlfriend/mistress.

by Diana Yue