

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 hope

期

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kei4*

Meaning: period, date, expect, expectation

期 (radical 月 *yue4*, moon) means 時期 (*shi2 qi1* = time-period), 日期 (*ri4 qi1* = day-period = date). 期刊 (*qi1 kan1* = period-publish) = periodical/journal. 期貨 (*qi1 huo4* = period-goods = futures) are 長期 (*chang2 qi1* = long-term) investments. Marriages have 蜜月期 (*mi4 yue4 qi1* = honey-moon-periods), 冷戰期 (*leng3 zhan4 qi1* = cold-war-periods).

期待 (*qi1 dai4* = period-wait) means expect/long for. Strangers 不期而遇 (*bu4 qi1 er2 yu4* = un-expected/premeditated-and-but-meet = accidentally meet). Construction 如期完成 (*ru2 qi1 wan2 cheng2* = as-period/longing-finish-succeed = is completed on time). Old-maid 嫁杏無期 (*jia4 xing4 wu2 qi1* = marry/wed-apricot-has-no-date = has no marriage prospects).

Sick pilgrims 期望 (*qi1 wang4* = period/longing-look = hope/wish for) miracle-cure.

by Diana Yue