

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 comradeship

Putonghua pronunciation: *lian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *luen4*

Meaning: link, join, alliance, combination, contact, relate

聯 (耳 *er3*, ear + 系 *xi4*, link) means 聯系 (*lian2 xi4* = link-contact), 聯合 (*lian2 he2* = join-unite): 聯名 (*lian2 ming2* = jointly-sign/propose), 聯婚 (*lian2 hun1* = join-in-matrimony), 聯軍 (*lian2 jun1* = allied-forces). 聯絡人 (*lian2 le42 ren2* = link-tangle-person) = contact-person/liaison-officer,

聯邦 (*lian2 bang1* = joined-states) = federation. 聯邦調查局 (*lian2 bang1 diao4 cha2 ju2* = federal-investigate-bureau) = US's Federal Bureau of Investigation, abbr. FBI. 聯想 (*lian2 xiang3* = linked-thoughts) = imagination/association or Chinese name of Lenovo.

Comrades 聯手 (*lian2 shou3* = join-hands/forces), form 聯盟 (*lian2 meng2* = joint-alliance). In 1971 PRC 入聯 (*ri4 lian2* = entered-聯合國 *lian2 he2 guo2* = link-join-countries = the United Nations), replacing ROC.