

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 diplomatic relations

敵

Putonghua pronunciation: *di2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *dik6*

Meanings: enemy, foe, rival

敵 = 敵人 (*di2 ren2* = enemy~person = enemy). 敵意 (*di2 yi4* = enemy~feeling) = animosity/hostility. 天敵 (*tian1 di2* = heaven/natural~enemy). 情敵 (*qing2 di2* = emotion/love~enemy = wooers of same man/woman) 敵視 (*di2 shi4* = enemy~look = distrust/hate) each other.

敵對 (*di2 dui4* = enemy~facing = antagonistic) countries collect 敵情 (*di2 qing1* = enemy~circumstances/information = enemy intelligence). Foolish ruler 敵友不分 (*di2 you3 bu4 fen1* = enemy~friend~no~distinguish = can't tell friend from foe), 輕敵 (*qing1 di2* = light/under~estimates enemy), eventually 不敵 (*bu4 di2* = cannot~enemy/compete = is beaten by) invader.

Superpower has no 敵手 (*di2 shou3* = enemy~hand = rival). 天下無敵 (*tian1 xia4 wu2 di2* = heaven~below~no~enemy) describes strongest/matchless hero/weaponry/scheme.

by Diana Yue