

Character Builder

您好學嗎？

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 leaders

Putonghua pronunciation: *cai2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *choi4*

Meaning: talent, ability, ingenuity, talented person

才 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means talent: 詩才 (*shi1 cai2* = poetic-talent), 畫才 (*hua4 cai2* = painting-talent). Napoleon was 將才 (*jiang4 cai2* = general-talent = talented military leader). Speaker demonstrates 辯才 (*bian4 cai2* = debate-talent = oracular flair), 才智 (*cai2 zhi4* = talent-clever-wit).

Actress 才貌雙全 (*cai2 mao4 shuang1 quan2* = talent-looks-both-perfect = has both beauty and talent). Manager uses 才幹 (*cai2 gan4* = ingenuity-ability) to promote her 才華 (*cai3 hua3* = talent-glamour = fine/dazzling talent).

庸才 (*yong1 cai2* = ordinary-talent = mediocre people) envy 才子 (*cai2 zi3* = talented-men = men boasting literary talent/flair), but none can rival 李白 (*Li3 Bai2*, Tang Dynasty poet)'s 天才 (*tian1 cai2* = heavenly-talent = genius).

by Diana Yue