

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 heroes

勇

Putonghua pronunciation: *yong3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yung5*

Meaning: brave, valiant, daring, fierce, ferocious, courageous

勇 (radical 力 *li4*, strength/force) involves 體力 (*ti3 li4* = body-strength), 勇氣 (*yong3 qi4* = brave-energy = daring/courage/valour). 勇士 (*yong3 shi4* = brave-men/warrior) is 勇敢 (*yong3 gan3* = bold-and-daring), 勇猛 (*yong3 meng3* = bold-and-ferocious), 勇冠三軍 (*yong3 guan4 san1 jun1* = brave-top-three-armies) describes peerless knight/fighter.

Priest tells confessor: 勇於認錯 (*yong3 yu1 ren4 cuo4* = bravely-admit-mistakes), 鼓起勇氣 (*gu3 qi3 yong3 qi4* = drum-up-brave-energy = muster up your courage), 勇往直前 (*yong3 wang3 zhi2 qian2* = bravely-charge/forgo-ahead).

智勇雙全 (*zhi4 yong3 shuang1 quan2* = wise/clever-and-bold-both-complete = smart, daring) guy beats 蠻勇 (*man2 yong3* = barbarically/headstrong-fierce) rival who 有勇無謀 (*you3 yong3 wu2 mou2* = has-bravery-has-no-plot = can fight but can't think/strategize).

by Diana Yue