

# 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:

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 dress codes

禮

Putonghua pronunciation: *li3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lai5*

Meaning: ceremonies, rites, propriety, decorum, manners

禮 (radical 礻 = 示 *shi4*, god/manifest) = 禮教 (*li3 jiao4* = rites/propriety-teaching, Confucianism's behavioral code): 禮儀 (*li3 yi2* = rites/ceremonies), 禮貌 (*li3 mao4* = decorum/politeness-manners), 禮物 (*li3 wu4* = polite-thing = gift), 禮拜 (*li3 bai4* = treat-respectfully-worship/idolize) means worship or Christian/western calendar's seven-day week.

Bride wearing 婚紗 (*hun1 sha1* = wedding/bridal-veil) and groom wearing 燕尾服 (*yan4 wei3 fu2* = swallow's-tail-dress = tails/tuxedo) hold 婚禮 (*hun1 li3* = marriage/wedding-ceremony) in 禮堂 (*li3 tang2* = ceremonial-hall). Widow wears 喪服 (*sang1 fu2* = mourning-dress) at husband's 葬禮 (*zang4 li3* = bury/inter-ceremony = burial/funeral).

有禮 (*you3 li3* = has-manners) = polite. Neglecting party's dress-code is 無禮 (*wu2 li3* = lacking-manners), 失禮 (*shi1 li3* = lose-manners = impolite/rude/embarrassing).

by Diana Yue