

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:

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 wedding day

婚

Putonghua pronunciation: *hun1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fan1*

Meaning: marriage, marry, wed

Characters 婚 (*hun1* = marry/marriage), 娶 (*qū3* = take wife), 嫁 (*jià4* = wed husband), 媒 (*mei2*, matchmaker) all have radical 女 (*nǚ3*, female/woman). Today people prefer 婚姻自由 (*hun1 yin1 zi4 you2* = marriage-link-self-let = freedom of marriage) to 盲婚啞嫁 (*mang2 hun1 ya3 jia4* = blind-marry-mute-wed-husband = arranged marriages).

Lovers 訂婚 (*ding4 hun1* = book-marriage = get engaged), hold 婚禮 (*hun1 li3* = marriage-ceremony = wedding), sign 婚約 (*hun1 yue4* = marriage-agreement), exchange 結婚指環 (*jie2 hun1 zhi3 huan2* = tie-knot-marriage-finger-ring = wedding rings/bands), give 婚宴 (*hun1 yan4* = wedding-banquet).

Without 婚前協議 (*hun1 qian2 xie2 yi3* = marriage-before- agree-discuss = prenuptial agreement), loving couple celebrates 金婚 (*jin1 hun1* = gold-marriage = golden wedding anniversary).

by Diana Yue