

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 heroes

Putonghua pronunciation: *cai2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *choi4*

Meaning: talent, ability, expertise, genius, talented person, person

才 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) means 才能 (*cai2 neng2* = talent-ability), 才華 (*cai2 hua2* = talent-flair), 天才 (*tian1 cai2* = heavenly/natural-talent) = genius. TV host needs 才智 (*cai2 zhi4* = talents-intelligence/wit), 口才 (*kou3 cai2* = oral-talent = eloquence).

Boss 求才若渴 (*qiu2 cai2 ruo4 ke3* = seek-talents-resemble-thirsty = hungers/thirsts for talents), dislikes 蠢才 (*chun3 cai2* = stupid-persons/fools), sacks 奴才 (*nu2 cai2* = slavish/servile-persons = lackeys/minions), promotes 人才 (*ren2 cai2* = person-talent = outstanding talents), praises CEO's 幹才 (*gan4 cai2* = work/executive-abilities/expertise).

Society needs 大將之才 (*da4 jiang4 zhi1 cai2* = great-general's -talent = outstanding leaders), especially those who 才德兼備 (*cai2 de2 jian4 bei4* = talents-morals-both-have = combine high morals with distinguished learning/talents).

by Diana Yue