

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 dress codes

Putonghua pronunciation: **he2**

Cantonese pronunciation: **hap6**

Meaning: join, match, suitable, together, conform to, acceptable

合 (合 **ji2**, three sides enclosed + 口 **kou3**, mouth) = 吻合 (**wen3 he2** = muzzle/mouth-shut) = 適合 (**shi1 he2** = suit-fit): 合法 (**he2 fa3** = conforming-to-law, legal/legitimate), 合理 (**he2 li3** = conforming-to-reason, reasonable).

合群 (**he2 qun2** = fit/join-crowd = sociable), 合作 (**he2 zuo2** = together-work = cooperative) people are never 不合時宜 (**bu4 he2 shi2 yi2** = not-suit-time-approve = passé).

Clothes must 符合 (**fu2 he2** = conform-to-suit) 場合 (**chang2 he2** = field-event = venue/occasion), otherwise 於禮不合 (**yu1 li3 bu4 he2** = of-rite/propriety-not-suitable = are impolite).

Beauty-queen craves 合時 (**he2 shi2** = suit-time = fashionable), 合身 (**he2 shen1** = suit-body = figure-fitting), 合意 (**he2 yi4** = suit-feeling/fancy = to her liking) ball-gown.

by Diana Yue