

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 job-hunting

位

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wai2*

Meanings: position, seat

位 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, person + 立 *li4*, stand) means seat/position: 座位 (*zuo4 wei4* = chair-seat), 位子 (*wei4 zi0* = seat~diminutive), 空位 (*kong1 wei4* = empty~seat/post), 換位 (*huan4 wei4* = change/swap-seats/positions).

Driver finds building's 方位 (*fang1 wei4* = facing-direction~position) by 全球定位系統 (*quan2 qiu2 ding4 wei4 xi4 tong3* = entire~globe~determine~position~link~system = Global Positioning System = GPS).

Graduate fills 位置 (*wei4 zhi4* = seat~position) in firm, but 不安於位 (*bu4 an1 yu1 wei4* = not~contented~on~seat/position = is restless/ambitious, wants change), believes another firm 虛位以待 (*xu1 wei4 yi3 dai4* = vacate~seat/position~to~wait~for = is keeping a position open for him). 位高勢危 (*wei4 gao1 shi4 wei1* = position~high~situation~insecure) describes ruler anytime toppled/removed.

by Diana Yue