

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 contracts

約

Putonghua pronunciation: *yüe1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yeuk3*

Meaning: appointment, contract, bind, control, restrain, constrain

約 (radical 糸 *xi4* = silk/thread/bind) indicates bind/agree: 約見 (*yüe1 jian4* = make-appointment-to-see), 約會 (*yüe1 hui4* = agreed-meeting = date/appointment), 條約 (*tiao2 yüe1* = line/section-contract = treaty), 死約 (*si3 yüe1* = dead/fixed/irrevocable-contract).

Lawyer drafts 合約 (*he2 yüe1* = agree/combine-bind = contract). Partners 簽約 (*qian1 yüe1* = sign-contract). 租約 (*zu1 yüe1* = rental-agreement/contract) is 商業合約 (*shang1 ye43 he2 yüe1* = commercial-contract), has 約束力 (*yüe1 su1 li4* = bind-tie-strength/power = binding power), partners must 守約 (*shou3 yüe1* = guard-contract = honour contract).

佳人有約 (*jia1 ren2 you3 yüe1* = beautiful-person-has-appointment) = has date/rendez-vous with pretty woman. Man 赴約 (*fu4 yüe1* = goes-to-appointment), but she 失約 (*shi1 yüe1* = lose-appointment = didn't show up).

by Diana Yue