

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 making friends

Putonghua pronunciation: *you3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *you5*

Meanings: friend, befriend

Pictogram of character 友 shows two hands touching. 友人 (*you3 ren2* = friend~person) = 朋友 (*peng2 you3* = associate~friend) = friend. 友愛 (*you3 ai4* = friend~love) = loving friendship. Adult calls child, “小朋友!” (*xiao3 peng2 you3* = little~friend = “Hi, kid!”)

交友 (*jiao1 you3* = cross/link~friends = making friends) requires wisdom: 相識 (*xiang1 shi1* = mutual-know = acquaintance), 好友 (*hao3 you3* = good~friend), 諍友 (*zheng4 you3* = criticism~friend = friend offering honest criticism/advice). Fools 敵友不分 (*di2 you3 bu4 fen1* = enemy~friend~no~distinguish = can't distinguish enemies from friends).

Rivals 化敵為友 (*hua4 di2 wei4 you3* = transform/abandon~hostility~become~friends), sing “友誼萬歲!” (*you3 yi2 wan4 sui4* = friend~pleasant-relationship~ten-thousand-age = “Long live friendship!”)

by Diana Yue