

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

慎

Putonghua pronunciation: *shen4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *san6*

Meanings: cautious, prudent

Character 慎 = 忄 (= 心 *xin1*, heart) + 真 (*zhen1*, true/honest). 慎重 (*shen4 zhong4* = cautious-heavy/serious) = weigh situation carefully. Well-bred person 慎言 (*shen4 yan2* = cautious-words = minds/checks his speech), 慎行 (*shen4 xing2* = cautious-action, = minds/checks his behavior).

謹慎 (*jin3 shen2* = obedient/prim-cautious) = prudent. Cautious/timid person 謹小慎微 (*jin3 xiao3 shen4 wei1* = prudent-small-cautious-tiny = takes even small things cautiously), never 亂來 (*luan4 lai2* = confuse-come = do things blindly/rashly).

一個不慎 (*yi1 ge4 bu4 shen4* = one-unit-no-cautious = just one careless mistake), you may 誤交損友 (*wu4 jiao1 sun3 you3* = mistake-make-harmful-friend = get mixed up with bad people). “慎之!” (*shen4 zhi1* = cautious-it) = “Be careful, think it through!”

by Diana Yue