

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 old family money



Putonghua pronunciation: *feng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fung1*

Meanings: wind, style, trend

風 means air current, style, trend: venue/cuisine's 風味 (*feng1 wei4* = style~taste = taste/charm), writer's 文風 (*wen2 feng1* = literary~style), society's 風俗 (*feng1 su2* = wind~secular/convention = conventions), 風氣 (*feng1 qi4* = trend~breath = moral culture). 風言風語 (*feng1 yan2 feng1 yu3* = wind~words~wind~speech) = rumors.

In old China educated families observe 舊家風 (*jiu4 jia1 feng1* = passé~family~style = traditional familial practices, e.g. 敬老 (*jing4 lao3* = respecting~elders), 請安 (*qing3 an1* = request~calm = giving deferential obeisances).

Distinguished family upholds 家風 (*jia1 feng1* = family~style = family's moral requirements), wants sons/daughters to be 風雅 (*feng1 ya3* = wind/poetic~elegant = cultured/refined), become society's 風雲人物 (*feng1 yun2 ren2 wu4* = winds~clouds~person~object = powerful/influential personalities).

by Diana Yue