

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 Mid-Autumn Festival

秋

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiu 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chau 1*

Meanings: autumn

After 立秋 (*li4 qiu1* = stand/begin~autumn = 13th solar-term), 秋分 (*qiu1 fen1* = autumn~divide = 16th solar-term, autumn equinox) comes 中秋節 (*zhong1 qiu1 jie2* = Mid-Autumn-Festival). We enjoy 秋高氣爽 (*qiu1 gao1 qi4 shuang3* = autumn~high~air~crisp = autumn's cool/dry weather), 菊黃蟹肥 (*ju1 huang2 xie4 fei2* = chrysanthemums~yellow~crabs~fat = chrysanthemums and crabs season).

秋夜 (*qiu1 ye4* = autumn~evenings/nights) inspire poetry. 秋水 (*qiu1 shui3* = autumn~water) means rivers' autumn swelling/flooding or attractive woman's lucid glance. 送秋波 (*song4 qiu1 bo11* = present~autumn~wave/ripple) means sending inviting glances/signals to men/companies/parties.

In old China convicts were beheaded at 秋決 (*qiu1 jue2* = autumn~executions). 多事之秋 (*duo1 shi4 zhi1 qiu1* = many~things/problems~'s~autumn) means period of trouble/unrest in society/organization.