

# 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.

## This week: Words about the beaches

(radical 氵 = 水 shui = water)  
Pronunciation: *sha* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *sa* (Cantonese, 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: sand, grain

沙 = sand: 沙子 (*sha zi* = sand~diminutive = grain of sand), 沙洲 (*sha zhou* = sand~continent = shoal/sandbank), 沙漠 (*sha mo* = sandy~desert), 沙丘 (*sha qiu* = sand~dune). 沙細水滑 (*sha xi shui hua* = sands~fine~water~smooth) describes nice beaches. 沙灘排球 (*sha tan pai qiu* = sandy~beach~row~ball) = beach volleyball.

泥沙 (*ni sha* = soil~sand) = mixture of soil/mud and sand. 沙啞 (*sha ya* = sand/grain~mute) describes hoarse voices. 沙糖 (*sha tang* = sand-sugar) is red granulated sugar. 紅豆沙 (*hong dou sha* = red~bean~sand/grain) is meshed red beans sweet soup.

Crude writing contains 沙石 (*sha shi* = sands~stones = rough spots). 含沙射影 (*han sha she ying* = mouth-holding~sand~shoot-at~shadow) means innuendo.