

# 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 animal stories

Putonghua pronunciation: *chong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chung4*

Meanings: insect, worm, bug

狐 = 狐狸 (*hu2 li2* = fox~badger) = fox. 銀狐 (*yin2 hu2* = silver~fox) has prized fur. In Chinese legends, 妖狐 (*yao1 hu2* = demon foxes) become 狐仙 (*hu2 xian1* = fox~fairies), appear as beautiful/bewitching women, so 狐狸精 (*hu2 li2 jing1* = fox~demon) means bad women who snatch husbands.

Foxes/thieves 偷雞摸狗 (*tou1 ji1 mo1 gou3* = steal~chicken~touch~dog = steal/snatch small animals/things). 臭狐 (*chou4 hu2* = stink~fox) = repellant body odor. Villain 露出狐狸尾巴 (*lu4 chu1 hu2 li2 wei3 ba1* = shows~out~fox's~tail) = sly/evil intentions exposed.

Aesop's fox famously says: “吃不到的葡萄是酸的!” (*chi1 bu4 dao4 de0 pu2 tao2 shi4 suan1 de0* = eat~un~available~'s~grapes~are~sour): “Unobtainable grapes/things are sour/no good!”

by Diana Yue