

# 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 more animal stories



Putonghua pronunciation: *hu3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foo2*

Meanings: tiger

虎 (= 老虎 *lao2 hu3* = old-tiger) is fierce/brave/cruel. 虎父犬子 (*hu3 fu4 quan3 zi3* = tiger~father~dog~son) describes contrast between successful father and disappointing son. 捋虎鬚 (*luo1 hu3 xu1* = stroke-tiger's~whiskers) means irritating/taunting fierce strong person/power.

In legend 武松打虎 (*Wu3 Song1 da3 hu3* = Wu~Song~beats~tiger), hero Wu Song 喝醉 (*he1 zui4* = drink~drunken = got drunk), encountered tiger, 空手殺虎 (*kong1 shou3 sa1 hu3* = empty/bare-handed~killed~tiger).

In Buddhist legend, young prince saw 雌虎 (*ci1 hu3* = female~tiger) with cubs starving, showed 慈悲 (*ci2 bei1* = kind~sorrow = mercy), 自殘 (*zi4 can2* = self~hurt = wounded himself), 捨身飼虎 (*she3 shen1 si4 hu3* = sacrifice~body~feed-tiger), let tiger eat his body and milk her cubs.

by Diana Yue