

# 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 missing persons



Putonghua pronunciation: *an4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngon6*

Meanings: table, file, case

案 originally means table. 拍案 (*pai1 an4* = bang-on~table) is gesture indicating passion/anger. Infuriated person 拍案而起 (*pai1 an4 er2 qi3* = bangs-on~table~and~springs-up to shout/act). Clever story-plot makes reader 拍案叫絕 (*pai1 an4 jiao4 jue2* = bang-on~desk~exclaim~“Absolutely-wonderful!”)

檔案 (*dang4 an4* = slot~table) = record/file. Police handle 案件 (*an4 jian4* = record/file~piece = 案子 *an4 zi0* = case~unit = filed cases). Criminal 作案 (*zuo4 an4* = make~case = commits crime). Police 立案 (*li4 an4* = establish/open~case), 查案 (*cha2 an4* = investigate~case), 破案 (*po4 an4* = crack~case), 結案 (*jie2 an4* = closes~case).

Missing persons 人間蒸發 (*ren2 jian1 jing1 fa1* = people~region~steam~swell = evaporate/vanish from world), leaving 懸案 (*xuan2 an4* = suspended/unsolved~cases).

by Diana Yue