

# 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 political parties

內

Putonghua pronunciation: *nei4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *noi6*

Meanings: inside, inner, internal

內 is opposite of 外 (*wai4*, external). 內容 (*nei4 rong2* = inside~contain) = contents. 內心 (*nei4 xin1* = inside~heart) = person's inner feelings. 外科 (*wai4 ke1* = out~branch) = surgery, 內科 (*nei4 ke1* = internal~branch) = internal medicine.

In old-fashioned/elegant parlance, “外子” (*wai4 zi3* = outside~diminutive) is “my husband”, “內子” (*nei4 zi3* = inside~diminutive) is “my wife”. To Chinese, 國內 (*guo2 nei4* = country~inside) means inside China, 國外 (*guo2 wai4* = country~outside) = 海外 (*hai3 wai4* = seas~outside) means abroad.

In political factions, 內部矛盾 (*nei4 bu4 mao2 dun4* = inner~part~spear~shield = internal contradiction/discord) often cause 內鬥 (*nei4 dou4* = internal~struggle = internal feuds). 內鬼 (*nei4 gui3* = inside~ghost) means hidden betrayer/mole.