

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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 right and wrong

非

Putonghua pronunciation: *fei1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fei1*

Meanings: not, non, undo

非 = 不 (bu4, not): 非常 (*fei1 chang2* = not-usual = very/extraordinary), 非法 (*fei1 fa3* = il~legal), 非禮 (*fei1 li3* = non~rites/polite/decent = molest), 非常時期 (*fei1 chang2 shi2 qi1* = not-ordinary-time~period, e.g. curfews). 非人生活 (*fei1 ren2 sheng1 huo2* = not~human~born~live) = poor/deprived life. 非驢非馬 (*fei1 lu2 fei1 ma3* = neither~donkey~nor~horse) describes inaccurate portrayal/imitation.

Fallacies 似是而非 (*si4 shi4 er2 fei1* = resemble~correct~yet~ are-wrong). Hypocrites 口是心非 (*kou3 shi4 xin1 fei1* = mouth~yes~heart~no = say one thing, think/plot another). 是非 (*shi4 fei1* = right~wrong) = gossip concerning 誰是誰非 (*shei2 shi4 shei2 fei1* = who's~right~who's~wrong).

非殖民地化 (*fei1 zhi2 min2 di4 hua4* = undo~plant~people~land~transform = decolonization) gives colony independence.