

# 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 England

獅

Putonghua pronunciation: *shi1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *si1*

Meanings: lion

獅子 (*shi1 zi0* = lion-diminutive = lion), 萬獸之王 (*wan4 shou4 zhi1 wang2* = ten-thousand-beast-'s-king = king of beasts), symbolizes regality/bravery/ferocity. 雄獅 (*xiong2 shi1* = male-lion) rules pack of 母獅 (*mu3 shi1* = mother/female-lions).

Chinese martial artists perform 舞獅 (*wu3 shi1* = dance-lion = lion dance) on festive occasions. Shaolin monks practice 獅吼功 (*shi1 hou3 gong1* = lion~roar-kung-fu). 河東獅吼 (*he2 dong1 shi1 hou3* = river~east-lion~roars) describes fierce wife shouting at husband.

Ancient 波斯 (*bo1 si1* = "Persian"-transliterated) sculptures feature winged lions. England had 獅心王理查 (*shi1 xin1 wang2 li3 cha2* = lion-heart~king~"Richard"-transliterated = Richard the Lionheart). “獅子銀行” (*shi1 zi0 yin2 hang2* = lion~diminutive~silver~hong = lion bank) is HSBC's nickname.