

# 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.

## This week: Words about drugs

Pronunciation: *du* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *duk* (Cantonese, 6<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: poison, evil

Snakes/pesticides/cancers 有毒 (*you du* = have~poison = are poisonous). Murderers 下毒 (*xia du* = drop~poison) in food/drink, 放毒氣 (*fang du qi* = release~poisonous~gas), victims 中毒 (*zhong du* = hit-by~poison = are poisoned).

Drug addicts 吸毒 (*xi du* = inhale/consume~poison) = take 毒品 (*du pin* = poison~products = drugs/narcotics): 海洛英 (*hai luo ying* = “heroin”-transliterated), 嗎啡 (*ma fei* = “morphine”-transliterated), 大麻 (*da ma* = marijuana), 冰 (*bing* = ice-drug), try to 戒毒 (*jie du* = get-off~drugs). China fought two 鴉片戰爭 (*ya pian zhan zheng* = Opium Wars) with Britain.

Evil-doers 下毒手 (*xia du shou* = down~poison~hand = strike/act venomously to harm/kill others). Marilyn Monroe committed suicide by 服毒 (*fu du* = swallowing~poison).

by Diana Yue