

# 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 flooding

Putonghua pronunciation: *ba4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ba3*

Meanings: dam

Character 壩 = 土 (*tu3*, earth) + 霸 (*ba4*, strong power/bully). 霸王 (*ba4 wang2* = bully-king) = domineering ruler/bully. 霸權 (*ba4 quan2* = bully-power) = hegemony. 壩 stands across river canyons/gorges, harnesses river's 水力 (*shui3 li4* = water-power). China's 三峽大壩 (*san1 xia3 da4 ba4* = Three-Gorges-big-dam = the Three Gorges Dam) stands astride 長江三峽 (*Chang2 Jiang2 San1 Xia3* = Long-River-three-gorges the Yangtze Gorges) at 重慶 (*Chong2 Qing2* = Chongqing).

When upstream's 洪水 (*hong2 shui3* = flood-water = floods/deluge) arrive at Chongqing, 洪峰 (*hong2 feng1* = flood-peak) passes through 洩洪閘 (*xie4 hong2 zha2* = discharge-flood-gates = flood-gates), 流量 (*liu2 liang4* = water-flow-volume) is controlled. 水庫 (*shui3 ku4* = water-storage = reservoirs) capture flood water.