

# 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 policemen

警

(radical 言 yan = words)

Pronunciation: *jing* (Putonghua, 3<sup>rd</sup> tone), *ging* (Cantonese, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone)

Basic meaning: alert, alarm, warn, police, cop

警 = alert/warn: 警告 (*jing gao* = warn~tell) = warn, 警報 (*jing bao* = alarm~inform) = alarm/sirens. Mice are 警覺 (*jing jue* = alert~feel = alert) about cats.

警察 (*jing cha* = alert/warn~watch/detect) = police: 警員 (*jing yuan* = police~member = constable), 警車 (*jing che* = police~car), 交通警察 (*jiao tong jing cha* = cross~through~police = traffic police).

巡警 (*xun jing* = patrol~policemen) stop-search 可疑人物 (*ke yi ren wu* = can~suspect~person~thing = suspicious-looking persons). 便衣警探 (*bian yi jing tan* = convenient/informal~clothes~police~investigate = plainclothes policemen) contact 線人 (*xian ren* = thread~person = stool-pigeons). 臥底 (*e di* = lie-at~bottom = undercover) policemen penetrate 黑社會 (*hei she hui* = black~society~club = triad/criminal organizations).

by Diana Yue