

# 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 spring weather

暖

Putonghua pronunciation: *nuan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *nuen5*

Meanings: warm

暖 (radical 日 *ri4*, sun) = 溫暖 (*wen1 nuan3* = warmth~warm): 暖水瓶 (*nuan3 shui3 ping2* = warm/hot~water~bottle), 暖風 (*nuan3 feng1* = warm~wind/breeze), 暖色 (*nuan3 se1* = warm-color). 暖房 (*nuan3 fang2* = 溫室 *wen1 shi1* = warm~room = greenhouse) protects seedlings.

In springtime 氣溫 (*qi4 wen1* = 天氣溫度 *tian1 qi4 wen1 du4* = sky~breath~warmth~degree = weather temperature) becomes 暖和 (*nuan3 he2* = warm~congenial). 春暖花開 (*chun1 nuan3 hua1 kai1* = spring~warm~flowers~open) describes spring blooms.

暖心話 (*nuan3 xin1 hua4* = warm~heart~words = heart-warming words) make listener feel 暖洋洋 (*nuan3 yang2 yang2* = warmth~ooze~ooze = warmed, soothed). Sage laments 人情冷暖 (*ren2 qing2 leng3 nuan3* = people's~feelings~cold~warm = fickle/unpredictable shifting of sympathies).

by Diana Yue