

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 memory

強

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *keung4*

Meaning: strong, powerful, forceful, tyrannical, strengthen, improve, better

強 (radical 弓 *gong1*, bow) means strong/powerful: 強烈 (*qiang2 lie4* = strong-powerful) smell, 強勁 (*qiang2 jing4* = strong-forceful) gale, 強盜 (*qiang2 dao4* = strong-rob/robber) = bandit, 強姦 (*qiang2 jian1* = forced-adultery) = rape. G7 are presumably 強國 (*qiang2 guo2* = powerful-states).

Robin Hood 鋤強扶弱 (*chu2 qiang2 fu2 ruo4* = hoe/eradicate-strong-support-weak = punishes oppressors to help oppressed). Orphan 自強不息 (*zi4 qiang2 bu4 xi1* = self-strengthen-no-rest = keeps improving himself), becomes 強人 (*qiang2 ren2* = strong/dominant-person = strong political/business figure).

Scholar 博聞強記 (*bo2 wen2 qiang2 ji4* = broad-hear-strong-remember = has wide exposure, powerful memory). Pianist 強調 (*qiang2 diao4* = strong-tone = emphasizes) diligent practice, achieves 高強 (*gao1 qiang2* = high-level-strong = great) fingering techniques.

by Diana Yue