

# 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 accidents

Putonghua pronunciation: *shī* 1

Cantonese pronunciation: *sat* 1

Meanings: miss, error, loss

Accidents are mishaps: 交通失事 (*jiao1 tong1 shi1 shi4* = cross-through~error/mis~happening = traffic accident), 失火 (*shi1 huo3* = error/mis~fire = fire breakout), 失足 (*shi1 zu2* = error/ mis-foot/step = slip and fall), 失蹤 (*shi1 zong1* = lose~track = missing) persons, 失去 (*shi1 qu4* = lose~away = loses) wallet/ camera etc.

Accidents are unexpected. 意外 (*yi4 wai4* = idea/intention~beyond) means surprise/surprising. 交通意外 (*jiao1 tong1 yi4 wai4* = cross-through~intention~beyond) = traffic accident.

Accidents are unfortunate. 飛來橫禍 (*fei1 lai2 heng2 huo4* = fly~come~sideways~misfortune) = sudden, unexpected calamity. Wounded victim of 車禍 (*che1 huo4* = car~misfortune = car/traffic accident) 失血 (*shi1 xue4* = loses~blood), is rushed to hospital, yells “倒霉!” (*dao3 mei2* = downpour~mildew/rot/misfortune = “Bad luck!”)