

# 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 missing persons

滅

Putonghua pronunciation: *mie4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mit6*

Meanings: extinguish, exterminate, extinct

滅 (radical 灴 = 水 *shui3*, water) means extinct/die: swimmer 滅頂 (*mie4 ding3* = extinguish~top/head = sinks, drowns), candle 吹滅 (*chui1 mie4* = is-blown-out), earthquake victims 滅亡 (*mie4 wang2* = extinct~die = perish).

消滅 (*xiao1 mie4* = eliminate~destroy): 滅火 (*mie4 huo3* = put-out~fire), 滅蟲 (*mie4 chong2* = kill~insects). Soldiers 殲滅 (*qian1 mie4* = destroy~wipe-out) enemies. Mafia 殺人滅口 (*sha1 ren2 mie4 kou3* = kill~person~destroy~mouth = murders someone to stop him from talking).

滅門 (*mie4 men2* = destroy~door/clan) = entire family killed. 滅族 (*mie4 zu3* = destroy~tribe) = genocide. 秦滅六國 (*Qin2 mie4 liu4 guo2* = Qin-State-eliminated~six-other-states), unified China. Poet sighs: Ancient civilizations 灰飛煙滅 (*hui1 fei1 yan1 mie4* = ashes~fly~smoke~extinguished = went to dust!)

by Diana Yue