

# 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 salads

維

Putonghua pronunciation: *wei2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wai4*

Meanings: tie, maintain, preserve, keep

維 (radical 纟 = 糸 *mi4*, rope/string) means tie/maintain, hence 維持 (*wei2 chi2* = maintain-hold) means maintain/preserve. Parents 維護 (*wei2 hu4* = keep~protect = protect) their children. Garages 維修 (*wei2 xiu1* = keep-mend = repair) cars.

Employees work to 維生 (*wei2 sheng1* = maintain-livelihood/sustenance). Vitamin is translated as 維生素 (*wei2 sheng1 su4* = sustain-life~element). Vitamin's Chinese transliteration 維他命 (*wei2 ta1 ming4* = sustain-his~life) gave name to Hong Kong's soy-drink 維他奶 (*wei2 ta1 nai3* = sustain-his~milk = Vitasoy). Vegetables/fruit provide 纖維 (*qian1 wei2* = minute~strings = fibres/roughage) for bowels.

War-torn country needs the United Nations' 維和部隊 (*wei2 he2 bu4 dui4* = maintain~peace~section~team = Peacekeeping Force) to 維穩 (*wei2 wen3* = keep~steady = maintain social stability).

by Diana Yue