

# 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 Moses crossing the Red Sea

海

Putonghua pronunciation: *hai3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hoi2*

Meanings: sea, ocean, lake

海 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 海洋 (*hai3 yang2* = sea~ocean). Seamen 航海 (*hang2 hai3* = sail~seas), 海葬 (*hai3 zang4* = sea~bury = take sea burial). 海子 (*hai3 zi0* = sea~diminutive) means湖 (*hu2*, inland sea/lake).

Europe has 黑海 (*hei1 hai3* = Black~Sea), 裡海 (*li3 hai3* = inside~sea = Caspian Sea), 地中海 (*di4 zhong1 hai3* = land~centre/inside~sea = Mediterranean Sea). 海軍 (*hai3 jun1* = sea~army) = navy. 海洋法 (*hai3 yang2 fa3* = seas~oceans~law) = maritime law.

Led by 摩西 (*mo1 xi1* = "Moses"-transliterated), Israelites fled to 紅海 (*hong2 hai3* = Red-Sea). 海水 (*hai3 shui3* = sea~water) separated to let Israelites cross, then closed in, 淹死 (*yan1 si3* = drown~die = drowned) Egyptians.

by Diana Yue