

# 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 England



Putonghua pronunciation: *sha1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sa1*

Meanings: First word in Shakespeare's Chinese name

England under 伊利沙白一世 (*yi1 li4 sha1 bo2 yi1 shi4* = “Elizabeth”-transliterated~one/first-generation = Elizabeth I) produced 莎士比亞 (*sha1 shi4 bi3 ya4* = “Shakespeare”-transliterated).

莎劇 (*sha1 ju2* = Shakespearean~drama) include 悲劇 (*bei1 ju2* = sorrow~drama = tragedies), 喜劇 (*xi3 ju2* = joy~drama = comedies), describe 眾生相 (*zhong4 sheng1 xiang4* = multiple-lives-images = different walks of life): Italian lover 羅密歐 (*luo2 mi4 ou1* = “Romeo”-transliterated), Moorish general 奧塞羅 (*ao4 sai4 luo2* = “Othello”-transliterated), Jewish merchant 夏洛克 (*xia4 luo4 ke1* = “Shylock”-transliterated).

英聯邦 (*ying1 lian2 bang1* = England~link~states = British Commonwealth) countries use 英語 (*ying1 yu3* = English~language), promote 英國文學 (*ying1 guo2 wen2 xue2* = England~state~writing~study = English literature).

by Diana Yue