

# 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 water



Putonghua pronunciation: *gang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gong1*

Meanings: strong

水 forms 浪 (*lang4*, waves), 潮 (*chao2*, tides), 急流 (*ji2 liu2* = fast-flowing-currents/rapids), 瀑布 (*pu2 bu4* = tumbling-water-cloth = waterfalls).

Water is 陽剛 (*yang2 gang1* = yang-force~masculine = hard/strong). 冰川 (*bing1 chuan1* = ice~river = glaciers) cut through mountains. 水壩 (*shui3 ba4* = water~dams) harness 河水 (*he2 shui3* = river~water) for 水力發電 (*shui3 li4 fa1 dian4* = water~power~generate~electricity = hydro-electric power), 水庫 (*shui3 ku4* = water~vault = reservoirs). 蒸氣 (*zheng1 qi4* = steam~vapor) drives 蒸氣機 (*zheng1 qi4 ji1* = steam~engines).

Sage warns: 水能載舟，也能覆舟 (*shui3 neng2 zai4 zhou1, ye3 neng2 fu4 zhou1* = water~can~carry~boat, also~can~overturn~boat: The same power can help you but can also turn around and destroy you!)

by Diana Yue