

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

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 memory

刻

Putonghua pronunciation: *ke1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hak1*

Meaning: cut, incise, etch, inscribe, sculpt

刻 (radical 刂 = 刀 *dao1*, knife) = 雕刻 (*diao1 ke4* = sculpt-carve/etch/engrave): 木刻 (*mu4 ke1* = wood-carving), 石刻 (*shi2 ke1* = stone-carving), 刻印 (*ke1 yin4* = carve-print = Chinese art of seal-engraving).

刻板 (*ke4 ban3* = carve-woodblock) means rigid/unimaginative. In fable, stupid man who dropped sword from moving boat into sea 刻舟求劍 (*ke1 zhou1 qiu2 jian4* = etched-mark-on-boat-to-see-sword), fished for sword near mark after boat shored.

Novel describes lovers' 刻骨銘心 (*ke4 gu3 ming2 xin1* = carve-bone-engrave-heart = unforgettable) romance, 刻劃入微 (*ke4 hua4 ru4 wei1* = incise-draw-into-tiny = gives detailed/fine descriptions). Writer 刻意 (*ke4 yi4* = carve-idea = deliberately) chooses tragic ending, giving readers 深刻 (*shen1 ke4* = deeply-engraved = deep/profound) impact.

by Diana Yue