

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 furniture

架

Putonghua pronunciation: *jia4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gar1*

Meaning: rack, shelf, erect, construct, frame, structure, support, fight

架 (加 *jia1*, add + 木 *mu4*, wood) means 架構 (erected-structure), 樑架 (*kuang1 jia4* = frame-support). Workmen build 棚架 (*peng2 jia4* = wooden/bamboo-frame-scaffoldings), 書架 (*shu1 jia4* = book-racks/shelves), 花架 (*hua1 jia4* = flower-trellises). 架床疊屋 (*jia4 chuang2 die2 wu1* = pile-up-beds-layer-rooms) describes plan/writing containing redundant parts.

Models are good 衣架子 (*yi1 jia4 zi0* = clothes-rack-diminutive = have body frame for carrying clothes). Snobs 擺架子 (*bai3 jia4 zi0* = pose/display-haughty-gestures/airs).

Dissidents 打架 (*da3 jia4* = hit/beat-fight), 吵架 (*chao3 jia4* = bicker/quarrel-fight = lash/trade abuses), 架空 (*jia4 kong1* = lift/suspend-off-ground = disable) congress. Death-penalty prisoners fear 絞架 (*jiao3 jia4* = twist/wring/hang-rack = gallows), 十字架 (*shi2 zi4 jia4* = ten/"十"-character-shaped-rack = crucifix/cross).

by Diana Yue