

# 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 removing obstacles

掃

Putonghua pronunciation: **sao3**

Cantonese pronunciation: **so3**

Meaning: brush, sweep, broom, clean up, eliminate

掃 (radical 扌 = 手 **shou3**, hand) means brush/sweep-away: 掃塵 (**sao3 chen2** = brush-away-dust), 掃眉 (**sao3 mei2** = brush/paint-eye-brows), 掃帚 (**sao3 zhou3** = sweeping-broom), Cleaner 掃地 (**sao3 di4** = sweeps-the-floor). Intruders get 掃地出門 (**sao3 di4 chu1 men2** = sweep-floor-exit-door = kicked out). 掃描 (**sao3 miao2** = sweep-sketch) = CT scan,

Chinese 掃墓 (**sao3 mu4** = sweep-grave = visit/clean ancestors' graves) annually. Rain makes picnickers 掃興 (**sao3 xing4** = sweep-away-mood = disappointed).

掃除 (**sao3 chu2** = sweep-remove) = remove/eliminate: 掃雷 (**sao3 lei2** = remove-land-mines), 掃盲 (**sao3 mang2** = sweep-blind = eliminate illiteracy through education), Police conducts 掃蕩 (**sao3 dang4** = sweep-swirl = raids): 掃黃 (**sao3 huang2** = raid-on-sex-dens), 掃毒 (**sao3 du2** = raid-on-drug-dens).

by Diana Yue