

# 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: *rou2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yau4*

Meanings: gentle, flexible, mild, soft, supple, yielding

水 (= radicals 氵, 冫, 雨) forms 雨 (*yü3*, rain), 露 (*lu4*, dew), 滋潤萬物 (*zi1 run4 wan4 wu4* = nourish~wet~ten-thousand~things = brings life/enrichment to all). 柔情似水 (*rou2 qing2 si4 shui3* = gentle~love~resemble~water) describes woman's tolerant care/love.

Water is 陰柔 (*yin1 rou2* = yin-force~feminine = soft/gentle). Taiji~boxing/kungfu 以柔制剛 (*yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1* = use~gentleness~overcome~strong-force = dissolves/suppresses powerful blows with gentle movements).

Water can 柔調 (*rou2 tiao2* = gently~heal/soothe) wounds/conflicts. 老子 (*Lao3 zi3*, Daoist philosopher) said: 水善利萬物而不爭 (*shui3 shan4 li4 wan4 wu4 er2 bu4 zheng1* = water~good~benefit~ten-thousand~things~and~not~compete/fight = water benefits everything without competing with them). Conclusion: 上善若水 (*shang4 shan4 ruo4 shui3* = The-highest-good-is-like~water).

by Diana Yue