

# 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 Los Angeles

Putonghua pronunciation: *gong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gung1*

Meanings: work, engineering, industry

Pictogram 工 resembles 工具 (*gong1 jü4* = working-tools). 工人 (*gong1 ren2* = work~ers) 工作 (*gong1 zuo2* = work~do = work) in 工廠 (*gong1 cang3* = work~factories), earn 工資 (*gong1 zi1* = work~ capital = wages).

工業家 (*gong1 ye4 jia1* = work~industry~master = industrialists) dislike 工會 (*gong1 hui4* = workers~unions) for organizing 罷工 (*ba4 gong1* = abandon~work = strikes).

California has 精密工業 (*jing1 mi4 gong1 ye4* = fine~intricate~work~industry = sophisticated industries) making 飛機 (*fei1 ji1* = flying~machine = airplanes), 電腦 (*dian4 nao3* = electric~brain = computer). 加州理工學院 (*jia1 zhou1 li3 gong1 xue2 yuan4* = “Cal”-transliterated~state~reason~technology~studies~college) = California Institute of Technology, Caltech) trains 工程師 (*gong1 cheng2 shi1* = work~process~master = engineers).

by Diana Yue