

# 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 working



Putonghua pronunciation: noun *jin4*, adj. *jing4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging6*

Meanings: strong, strength, spirit, interest, effort, keenness, fun

勁 (radical 力 *li4*, strength) as noun means 勁道 (*jin4 dao4* = strength~force/gusto). Kung-fu is about 運勁 (*yün4 jin4* = summoning/applying~force). Hard bread has 咬勁 (*yao3 jin4* = chewy~fun/feel/texture). 費勁 (*fei4 jin4* = spend/waste~strength/effort) describes effort-demanding tasks.

New execs 幹勁衝天 (*gan4 jin4 chong1 tian1* = work~spirit~rush~skyward = work with tremendous zeal). 起勁 (*qi3 jin4* = rise~fervor = keen/aggressive) player beats 不起勁 (*bu4 qi3 jin4* = un~keen/laid-back) player. 不對勁 (*bu4 dui4 jin4* = no~right~spirit/feel) means “Something’s wrong!”

Adjective 勁 means 強勁 (*qiang2 jing4* = strong~powerful): 勁風 (*jing4 feng1* = fierce/strong~gale), 勁敵 (*jing4 di2* = tough~enemy). 疾風知勁草 (*ji2 feng1 zhi1 jing4 cao3* = swift~wind~know~strong~grass) means harsh attacks show who is resilient.