

# 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 promotion

獎

Putonghua pronunciation: *jiang3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeung2*

Meanings: praise, encourage, reward, award, commendation, prize

獎 (radical 犬 *quān3*, dog) originally meant spurring dog on. Now 獎 means 獎勵 (*jiang3 li4* = honor/award-encourage with gift/words). 獎券 (*jiang3 quān4* = prize-ticket = lottery) buyers dream of 中獎 (*zhong4 jiang3* = hit-target-prize = getting prize), 領獎 (*ling3 jiang3* = receiving-prize): 頭獎 (*tou2 jiang3* = head-prize = first prize), 二獎 (*er4 jiang3* = second-prize), 三獎 (*san1 jiang3* = third-prize).

Writers/scholars/athletes compete for 奧運獎牌 (*ao4 yun4 jiang3 pai2* = “O”lympics-transliterated-sports-award-plaque = Olympics medal), 諾貝爾獎 (*nuo4 bei4 er3 jiang3* = “Nobel”-transliterated-prize).

A-student gets 獎學金 (*jiang3 xue2 jin1* = award-study-gold/money = scholarship). Dedicated employee gets 勤工獎 (*qin2 gong1 jiang3* = diligent-work-prize = good/full attendance prize), 獎金 (*jiang3 jin1* = prize-gold/money = bonus).

by Diana Yue