

# 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: *xin1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *san1*

Meanings: spicy hot, bitter, pungent, laborious, suffering

Pictogram 辛 (resembling thorns/brambles) describes 辛香料 (*xin1 xiang1 liao4* = hot~fragrant~materials)'s spicy taste. Curry 味辛 (*wei4 xin1* = tastes~hot). Bile-juice 味苦 (*wei4 ku3* = tastes~bitter). 辛苦 (*xin1 ku3* = spicy-hot~bitter) means toil: 辛勤 (*xin1 qin2* = toil~diligently), 辛勞 (*xin1 lao2* = toil~labor).

辛辣 (*xin1 la4* = spicy~hot) describes satirist's sharp/scathing/unsparing remarks. After 辛酸 (*xin1 suan1* = spicy-hot~sour = pain/suffering) and 千辛萬苦 (*qian1 xin1 wan4 ku3* = thousand~spicy-hot~ten-thousand~bitter = countless hardships), trial/pilgrimage ends.

Poet writes: 誰知盤中餐, 粒粒皆辛苦 (*shei2 zhi1 pan2 zhong1 can1, li1 li1 jie1 xin1 ku3* = who~knows~bowl~inside~meal, grain~grain~all~hot~bitter = Who appreciates the rice in the bowl? Every grain comes from hard toil): Be thankful, treasure food.