

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:

- 1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
- 2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
- 3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
- 4th 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 residency

Putonghua pronunciation: *gong1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gung1*

Meanings: work, worker, labor, skill, skillful

Pictogram 工 resembles 工具 (*gong1 jü4* = working-tools). 工作 (*gong1 zuo2* = work-do) = work. 工業 (*gong1 ye4* = work/craft-profession) = industries. 罷工 (*ba4 gong1* = stop-work) = strike. 工廠 (*gong1 cang3* = work-factories), 工程 (*gong1 cheng2* = engineering-projects) hire 工人 (*gong1 ren2* = work-ers), 海外勞工 (*hai3 wai4 lao2 gong1* = seas-outside-labor-worker = migrant workers). Students 半工讀 (*ban4 gong1 du2* = half-work-study = work part-time while studying), do 暑期工 (*shu3 qi1 gong1* = summer-period-work = summer jobs). 僱主 (*gu4 zu3* = hire-master = employers) issue 工作證 (*gong1 zuo2 zheng4* = work-do-proof-document = work permits), pay 工資 (*gong1 zi1* = work-wages/salaries). 長期工 (*chang2 qi1 gong1* = long-term-worker) applies for residency.