

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

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 electricity

明

Putonghua pronunciation: *ming2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ming4*

Meaning: bright, clear, vivid, understand, enlightened, clarity

明 (日 *ri4*, sun + 月 *yue4*, moon) symbolizes brightness/clarity of vision/mind: 明亮 (*ming2 liang4* = bright-shining) eyes, 鮮明 (*xian1 ming2* = fresh-vivid) impression, 明顯 (*ming2 xian3* = clear-obvious) fact, 明確 (*ming2 que1* = clear-definite) proof. 明星 (*ming2 xing1* = bright-star) also means movie-star.

聰明人 (*cong1 ming2 ren2* = intelligent-bright-person) 明白 (*ming2 bai2* = brilliant-white/plain = understands) right and wrong. 光明 (*guang1 ming2* = light-brightness) symbolizes good/righteousness. 棄暗投明 (*qi4 an4 tou2 ming2* = abandon-darkness/evil-join-brightness = gives up bad ways/influences, joins good/righteous cause). 明主 (*ming2 zhu3* = bright-master) means enlightened ruler.

明喻 (*ming2 yu4* = obvious-comparison = similes) compare enlightening teacher/teaching to 明鏡 (*ming2 ming4* = bright-mirror), 明燈 (*ming2 deng1* = brightly-shining-lamp).

by Diana Yue