

# 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 fame and notoriety

頌

Putonghua pronunciation: *song4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jung6*

Meaning: praise, eulogy, verse/stanza, ode, eulogize, extol, laud

頌 (radical 頁 *xie2*, head/face-related) originally meant appearance/looks. 頌 are verses in ancient literature: 吠陀 (“Vedas”-transliterated, hymns of praise), Chinese 周頌 (*Zhou1 song4* = Zhou-Dynasty-ceremonial-hymns accompanying state religious ceremonies). 頌揚 (*song4 yang2* = praise-wave) = praise/eulogize.

頌歌 (*song4 ge1* = praise-song) = song of praise. Choir performs 聖頌 (*sheng4 song4* = sacred-praise/hymns/chants). At university ceremony bestowing honorary doctorate, 頌詞 (*song4 ci2* = laudatory-speech/address/citation) 歌功頌德 (*ge1 gong1 song4 de2* = sing-achievement-praise-virtue = praises honoree’s virtues and achievements).

快樂頌 (*kuai4 le4 song4* = cheer-happy-praise) = Beethoven’s Ode to Joy. 希臘古瓶頌 (*Xi1 La4 gu3 ping2 song4* = “Greece”-transliterated-ancient-bottle-praise) = Shelley’s Ode on a Grecian Urn. 芬蘭頌 (*Fen1 Lan2 song4* = “Fin-land”-transliterated-praise) = Sibelius’ Finlandia.

by Diana Yue