

# 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 Ebola

非

Putonghua pronunciation: *fei1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fei1*

Meaning: no, not, un-, transliteration of "Africa"

非 = 不 (*bu4*, not): 非常 (*fei1 chang2* = not-usual = very/ extraordinary), 非法 (*fei1 fa3* = il-legal), 是非 (*shi4 fei1* = correct/right-incorrect/wrong), 非攻 (*fei1 gong1* = Condemnation of Offensive War) is ancient Chinese anti-war treatise.

阿非利加洲 (A4 *Fei1 Li4 Jia1 zhou1* = "Africa"-transliterated-continent) = 非洲 (*Fei1 zhou1* = African continent). African slaves led 非人生活 (*fei1 ren2 sheng1 huo2* = in-human-born-live = inhuman/oppressed lives). China promotes 亞非拉 (*Ya4 Fei1 La1* = Asia-Africa-Latin-America) friendship.

西非 (Xi1 Fi1 = Western Africa) is in 非常時期 (*fei1 chang2 shi2 qi1* = not-ordinary-time-period = extremely crucial/difficult times), with 埃博拉出血熱 (*ai1 bo2 la1 chu1 xue3 ri4* = "Ebola"-transliterated-emit-blood-infection = Ebola virus disease) raging.

by Diana Yue