

# 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 choirs

部

Putonghua pronunciation: *bu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bo6*

Meanings: part, section

部 = 部份 (*bu4 fen4* = part-portion): 大部份 (*da4 bu4 fen4* = big~part-portion = most/majority), 小部份 (*xiao3 bu4 fen4* = small~part-portion = fewer/minority). Government has 部門 (*bu4 men2* = part-door = ministries/bureaus), e.g. 外交部 (*wai4 jiao1 bu4* = external-friendship~ministry = Ministry of Foreign Affairs). General commands 部隊 (*bu4 dui4* = part-team = army), 部下 (*bu4 xia4* = section-under = subordinates).

Patient's operated 部位 (*bu4 wei4* = part-position = location/area) receives 局部麻醉 (*ju2 bu4 ma2 zui4* = confined-part-numb-drunk = local/partial anesthesia). 下部 (*xia4 bu4* = under-part) means man/woman's lower private parts.

Choral singing involves 四聲部 (*si4 sheng1 bu4* = four-voice/vocal-parts: sopranos, altos, tenors, basses) 合唱 (*he2 chang4* = unite-sing = singing together).

by Diana Yue