

# 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 promotion

升

Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing1*

Meanings: measurement unit, rise, ascend, raise, promote

Noun 升 (radical 十 *shi2*, ten) is weight measure: 公升 (*gong1 sheng1* = metric-litre). Verb 升 = 上升 (*shang4 sheng1* = go-up~ascend). 升降機 (*sheng1 jiang4 ji1* = go-up~go-down~machine) = lift/elevator. On Ascension Day Jesus 升天 (*sheng1 tian1* = rise-to~heaven). 升旗禮 (*sheng1 qi2 li3* = raise-flag~ceremony) = flag-flying ceremony.

升級 (*sheng1 ji2* = rise~grade) means student/employee's promotion to higher grade. Smart employee 連升兩級 (*lian2 sheng1 liang3 ji2* = consecutively~rise~two~grades = gets two promotions in one breath).

Old-time Chinese bureaucrats want 升官發財 (*sheng1 guan1 fa1 cai2* = rise~office~grow~money = promotion bringing big fortune). Hong Kong speculators want housing prices to 升高 (*sheng1 gao1* = go~up), apartments to 升值 (*sheng1 zhi2* = rise-in~value = appreciate).