

# 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 new People's Congress

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhang3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jeung2*

Meanings: palm of hand, paw, grasp, manage, control

掌 (radical 手 *shou3*, hand) means person's 手掌 (*shou3 zhang3* = hand's~palm) or animal's 前掌 (*qian2 zhang3* = front~paw), 後掌 (*hou4 zhang3* = rear~paw). 拍掌 (*pai1 zhang3* = clapping~ hands) creates 掌聲 (*zhang3 sheng1* = hands~sound = clapping applause).

Male-chauvinist gives wife 一巴掌 (*yi1 ba1 zhang3* = one~slab~palm = hard slap) on face. Idiom 魚與熊掌 (*yü2 yü3 xiong2 zhang3* = fish~and~bear's~paw, both delicious) describes hesitancy/dilemma of someone who can only pick one of two good things.

掌櫃 (*zhang3 gui4* = control~shelves/drawers = proprietor/manager) 掌管 (*zhang3 guan3* = controls~manages) business's operations. President 掌權 (*zhang3 quan2* = controls~power), 掌政 (*zhang3 zheng4* = directs~administration). General 掌軍 (*zhang3 jun1* = leads~military), 掌握 (*zhang3 wo1* = controls~holds) army secrets.

by Diana Yue