

# 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 talents

Putonghua pronunciation: *nao 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *no 5*

Meanings: brain, mind

大腦 (*da nao 43* = big-brain = cerebrum) controls our motoring/mental functions, hence 主腦 (*zhu nao 23* = master-brain) means principal-planner/mastermind. 腦溢血 (*nao yi xue 343* = brain-spill/overflow-blood) = brain haemorrhage.

Memories stay in our 腦海 (*nao hai 23* = brain-sea = mind). When 傷腦筋 (*shang nao jin 131* = hurt-brain-tendon = brain-wracking) situations arise, we 絞盡腦汁 (*jiao jin nao zhi 3431* = wring-out-exhaust-brain-juice = think hard) for solutions.

電腦 (*dian nao 43* = electric-brain) = 電子計算機 (*dian zi ji suan ji 43441* = electricity-son-calculate-count-machine) = electronic computers: 桌上電腦 (*zhuo shang dian nao 1443* = table-on-electronic-brain = desktops), 手提電腦 (*shou ti dian nao 3243* = hand-hold/held-electronic-brain = laptops).