

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th 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 working

務

Putonghua pronunciation: *wu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mo6*

Meanings: task, mission, errand, work, commit to, commitment

務 (radical 力 *li2*, effort/strength) means 任務 (*ren4 wu4* = appointed~mission/task): 家務 (*jia1 wu4* = house~work), 醫務所 (*yi1 wu4 suo3* = medical~affairs~office = clinic). 國務院 (*guo2 wu4 yuan4* = state~affairs~bureau = State Department) hires 公務員 (*gong1 wu4 yuan2* = civil~servants). 特務 (*te4 wu4* = special~mission) = spy.

Verb 務 means work/commit to: 務農 (*wu4 nong2* = engage-in~farming), 務實 (*wu4 shi2* = do~solid = down-to-earth/practical-minded), 務虛 (*wu xu1* = do~flimsy/empty = vain/impractical). 不務正業 (*bu4 wu4 zheng4 ye4* = no~do~proper~profession) means idling or doing illegal things.

義務 (*yi4 wu4* = righteous/required~task) = obligation. Mao Zedong coined slogan “為人民服務” (*wei4 ren2 min2 fu2 wu4* = for~person~people~serve~work = “Serve the people”).