

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 body-checks

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging1*

Meaning: fear, alarm, stir, startle, fright, scare, surprise, shock, disquiet, consternation

驚 (radical 馬 *ma3*, horse) means 驚訝 (*jing1 ya4* = shocked-surprised), 驚慌 (*jing1 huang1* = fear-fright). War photos 觸目驚心 (*chu4 mu4 jing1 xin1* = touch-eyes-frighten-heart = look scary/disturbing). Lottery-winner 驚喜 (*jing1 xi3* = is surprised- happily).

Nightmare 驚醒 (*jing1 xing3* = startles-wakes) sleeper. 5-20 March is 驚蟄 (*jing1 zhe2* = Awakening-of-Insects), third of lunar calendar's twenty-four 節氣 (*jie2 qi4* = section-breath/weather = solar terms).

Cancer spreads at 驚人 (*jing1 ren2* = frighten-people = frightful/amazing/shocking) speed. Patient 處變不驚 (*chu4 bian4 bu4 jing1* = situated-in-change-not-frightened = stays calm despite calamity), but wife 大驚失色 (*da4 jing1 shi1 se1* = big-alarm-lose-color = pales with fright), 擔驚受怕 (*dan1 jing1 shou4 pa4* = carry-fear-receive-fright = suffers consternation).

by Diana Yue