

# 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 speech-making

題

Putonghua pronunciation: *ti2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tai4*

Meaning: title, topic, subject, write

題 (radical 頁 *ye4*, page) = 題材 (*ti2 cai2* = topic-subject-matter), 話題 (*hua4 ti2* = speech-topic = topic of conversation), 議題 (*yi4 ti2* = discussion-topic). Film's 主題 (*zhu3 ti2* = master/principal-subject-matter = main theme) gets echo in 主題曲 (*zhu3 ti2 qu3* = master-topic-song = theme song).

Teacher 出題目 (*chu1 ti2 mu4* = out/give-subject-eye = sets questions) for test/exam. Stupid student's answer 離題萬丈 (*li2 ti2 wan4 zhang4* = depart-from-title-ten-thousand-yards = is completely irrelevant).

Speaker delivers 專題演講 (*zhuān1 ti2 yǎn3 jiǎng3* = special-topic/theme-perform-talk = talk on special topic). Audience raise 問題 (*wèn2 ti2* = ask-subject = questions/problems). Speaker says resolving 難題 (*nán2 ti2* = difficult-problems/dilemmas) “沒問題!” (*mei2 wèn4 ti2* = “Doesn't-pose-any-problem!”)

by Diana Yue