

# 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 removing obstacles

絕

Putonghua pronunciation: *jüe2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juet3*

Meaning: extinguish, cut, sever, end, ultimate, extreme, finest, perfect, final

絕 (radical 系 = 絲 *si1*, silk/thread) means cut/sever/extinguish: 斷絕 (*duan4 jüe2* = cut-off), 氣絕 (*qi4 jüe2* = breathing-ceases), 絕路 (*jüe2 lu4* = dead-end-road), 絕緣體 (*jüe2 yüan2 ti3* = non-conducting-body/insulator).

絕對 (*jüe2 dui4* = ultimate-facing) = absolute: 絕技 (*jüe2 ji4* = fine/incomparable-skill), 絕色 (*jüe2 se1* = best-color = most beautiful woman), 絕配 (*jüe2 pei4* = perfect match), 絕密 (*jüe2 mi4* = top-secret), 絕唱 (*jüe2 chang4* = finest/final-song) means beautiful singing or inimitable performance of deceased diva.

絕望 (*jüe2 wang4* = end-hope = despairing) wife 絕食 (*jüe2 shi2* = abandons-eating), 絕不 (*jüe2 bu4* = absolutely-won't) forgive 絕情 (*jüe2 qing2* = sever-love = heartless) husband. Tribes get 滅絕 (*mie4 jüe2* = extinguished-completely) in genocide.