

# 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 lovers



Putonghua pronunciation: *ban4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *boon6*

Meanings: accompany, companion, partner

Character 伴 = 亻 (=人 *ren2*, person) + 半 (*ban4*, half), i.e. “the other half”. Kids need 玩伴 (*wan2 ban4* = play-companion = playmates). Girl invites 男伴 (*nan2 ban4* = man/boy-companion = escort/beau), man invites 女伴 (*nu3 ban4* = woman/girl-partner) to ball-dance.

Patient appreciates visitor's 陪伴 (*pei2 ban4* = accompany-companion = keeping company). Loner rejects 同伴 (*tong2 ban4* = together-accompany = companion). Pianist 伴奏 (*ban4 zou4* = accompany-perform = plays accompaniment) for vocalist/instrumentalist. 伙伴 (*huo3 ban4* = fellow-companion) means collaborating partners/buddies.

伴侶 (*ban4 lu3* = companion-mate) = mate in sexual/romantic/marital relationship. Wife is husband's 終身伴侶 (*zhong1 shen1 ban4 lu3* = lasting-life-companion-mate = lifelong partners), 老伴 (*lao3 ban4* = old-companion = companion in old age).

by Diana Yue