

# 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 assassins

刺

Putonghua pronunciation: *ci4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chi3*

Meanings: stab, prick, thorn, pierce, assassinate, bug information

刺 (radical 刂 = 刀 *dao1*, knife/dagger) means stab/pierce: 魚刺 (*yü2 ci4* = fish's-sharp-bone), 刺繡 (*ci4 xiu4* = needle-embroidery), 刺耳 (*ci4 er3* = piercing/grating~ears), 刺激 (*ci4 ji1* = prick~excite), 刺痛 (*ci4 tong4* = prickly~pain). 心中有刺 (*xin1 zhong1 you3 ci4* = heart-interior-has-thorn) means harboring secret grudge.

Spies 刺探 (*ci4 tan4* = pierce/penetrate~probe = probe/collect) information. Superpower feels rising state is 芒刺在背 (*mang2 ci4 zai4 bei4* = thorn~pricking~on~back = close/potential threat). 刺客 (*ci4 ke4* = stab/kill~er = assassin) 行刺 (*xing2 ci4* = carries-out~assassination) using 匕首 (*bi3 shou3* = spoon/arrow-head-head = dagger) or 鎗 (*qiang1*, pistol/rifle). Politician 被刺 (*bei4 ci4* = is~stabbed/struck by assassin): 刺傷 (*ci4 shang1* = stabbed/struck~wounded), 刺殺 (*ci4 sha1* = stabbed/struck~killed).

by Diana Yue