

# 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 attires



(radical 革 *ge2* = leather)

Putonghua pronunciation: *xie2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *haai4*

Meanings: shoes

鞋 = 鞋子 (*xie2 zi0* = shoe~diminutive). 布鞋 (*bu4 xie2* = cloth-made~shoes) are traditional Chinese footwear. Rustics wear 草鞋 (*cao3 xie2* = straw~shoes/sandals), 木屐 (*mu4 ji1* = wooden-clogs). City-dwellers wear 皮鞋 (*pi2 xie2* = leather~shoes). Sprinters wear 釘鞋 (*ding1 xie2* = pin/spike~shoe = track spikes). 雨靴 (*yu3 xue1* = rain~boot) = wellington boots. 馬靴 (*ma3 xue1* = horse~boot) = riding boots. 拖鞋 (*tuo1 xie2* = drag~shoes = slippers), 懶佬鞋 (*lan3 lao3 xie2* = lazy~chap~shoe = loafers) have soft 鞋底 (*xie2 di3* = shoe~bottom = soles), no 鞋帶 (*xie2 dai4* = shoe~strings).

踏破鐵鞋無覓處 (*ta1 po4 tie3 xie2 wu2 mi4 chu4* = tread-break-iron~shoes~no~search~place) describes prolonged/difficult/fruitless search for rare/hidden object/person.