

# Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (ㄗㄩ), 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

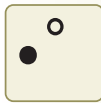
2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

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



Putonghua pronunciation: *xiōng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung1*

Meanings: fierce, ferocious, aggressive, violent, attacker, crime of violence

Ideogram 兇 suggests 凶 (*xiōng1*, ill-luck/mishap). 兇猛 (*xiōng1 měng3* = fierce-powerful) tiger 兇性大發 (*xiōng1 xìng4 dà4 fā1* = fierce-nature~big-burst = turns savage/ferocious/aggressive). Hiker missing on 凶險 (*xiōng1 xiǎn3* = ill-luck~danger = dangerous) jungle-trek 凶多吉少 (*xiōng1 duō1 jí2 shǎo3* = ill-luck~many~luck~little = probably got hurt/killed).

Wolves/bullies are 兇惡 (*xiōng1 è4* = fierce-hostile/bad/evil). Despots/mafia are 窮兇極惡 (*qióng2 xiōng1 jí2 è4* = exhaust~ fierce-ultimate-hostile/bad/evil). Hen-pecked husband fears wife's 兇巴巴 (*xiōng1 bā1 bā0* = fierce-ah~ah = fierce/scary-looking) expression.

Conspirators 買兇殺人 (*mǎi3 xiōng1 shā1 rén2* = buy/hire~killer/assassin~to-kill~someone). 兇手 (*xiōng1 shǒu3* = violent-crime-hand = attacker/killer) 行兇 (*xíng2 xiōng1* = commits~violent-crime). 元兇 (*yüán2 xiōng1* = primary~wrongdoer/culprit) is aided by 幫兇 (*bāng1 xiōng1* = help-wrongdoer/culprit = abettor).

by Diana Yue