

# 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 hair



Putonghua pronunciation: *fa3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *faat3*

Meanings: hair on the head

髮 (radical 彡 *biao1*, hair drooping) = 頭髮 (*tou2 fa3* = head's -hair): 長髮 (*chang2 fa3* = long-haired), 剪髮 (*jian3 fa3* = scissors-cut/trim-hair), 披頭四 (*pi1 tou2 si4* = loose-hair-four = The "Beatles"-transliterated) 披頭散髮 (*pi1 tou2 san4 fa3* = droop-hair-loosen-hair = keep long, loose hairstyle).

結髮夫妻 (*jie2 fa3 fu1 qi1* = tie-hair-husband-wife) = wedding couple tying their hair together with a knot, hence 髮妻 (*fa3 qi1* = hair-wife) means legal wife. 秀髮如雲 (*xiu4 fa3 ru2 yun2* = fine-hair-resemble-cloud) describes woman's rich/beautiful hair. 脫髮 (*tuo1 fa3* = fall-off-hair = balding) person 植髮 (*zhi2 fa2* = plants-hair), uses 假髮 (*jia3 fa3* = false-hair = wig/hair-piece). 落髮 (*luo4 fa3* = drop/discard-hair) means Buddhist monk/nun's tonsure.

by Diana Yue