

# 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 storytelling

說

Putonghua pronunciation: *shuo1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *suet3*

Meaning: say, talk, speak, tell, explain, narrate, account

說 (radical 言 *yan2*, words/speech) = 說話 (*shuo1 hua4* = speak-say things): 說明 (*shuo1 ming2* = say-understand = explain), 說服 (*shuo1 fu2* = say-convince = successfully persuade), 說不 (*shuo4 bu4* = say-no = refuse), 說真話 (*shuo1 zhen1 hua4* = say-truthful/honest-words). Humans/parrots/lawyers 會說話 (*hui4 shuo1 hua4* = can/adept-speak = can talk).

People surround 說謊 (*shuo1 huang3* = tell-lie = lying) official, 討說法 (*tao3 shuo1 fa3* = beg/demand-say-method = demand an explanation).

說故事 (*shuo1 gu4 shi4* = say-old-events) = tell stories. In ancient China, 說書人 (*shuo1 shu1 ren2* = tell-books-person = storytellers) told stories to crowds: “Long ago, someone 說道 (*shuo1 dao4* = said-spoke ...)” That’s how 小說 (*xiao3 shuo1* = little-talk = fiction/novels) originated.

by Diana Yue