

# 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 talents

Putonghua pronunciation: *yu* 2

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue* 4

Meanings: stupid, foolish, deceive

愚 = 愚笨 (*yu ben* 24 = stupid~clumsy/slow-witted), 愚昧 (*yu mei* 24 = stupid~unenlightened/ignorant). 愚弄 (*yu nong* 24 = fool-handle) = deceiving/tricking someone. 愚民政策 (*yu min zheng ce* 2244 = fool/deceive~people~administration~plan) = government policies that treat the people like fools.

愚蠢 (*yu chun* 23 = stupid~foolish) = 不智 (*bu zhi* 24 = un~wise). 大智若愚 (*da zhi ruo yu* 4442 = big~wise~resemble~stupid) describes great wisdom hidden behind professed ignorance/modesty.

Confucius said 上智下愚 (*shang zhi xia yu* 4442 = top~wise~bottom~stupid = gap between talented and stupid people) is irreversible. Mao Zedong, however, cited the fable “愚公移山” (*yu gong yi shan* 2424 = Foolish~Old-Man~moved~the-mountains) to explain how perseverance can perpetuate China’s socialist revolution.