

# 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 stockmarket gambling

元

Putonghua pronunciation: *yüan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen4*

Meanings: dollar

元 means origin/primary/principle. In springtime, 一元復始, 萬象更新 (*yi1 yüan2 fu4 shi3, wan4 xiang4 geng1 xin1* = one~primary-source~resume~begin, ten-thousand/all~aspects~change~new = the world begins a new cycle).

Money term 元 = homonym 圓 (*yüan2*, circular coin): 銀元/圓 (*yin2 yüan2* = silver~coin). 元 is generic term for currency: 美元 (*Mei3 yüan2* = A“me”-rican-transliterated~dollar = USD), 港元 (*Gang3 yüan2* = Hong-“Kong”~dollar = HKD), 日元 (*Ri4 yüan2* = 日本元 = *Ri2 ben3 yüan2* = Japanese~yen = ¥ = JPY), 澳元 (*Ao4 yüan2* = “Au”stralian-transliterated~dollar = AUD). 元 (\$ sign) is also currency unit: 十元 (*shi3 yüan2* = 10-dollar-unit) = \$10.

Speculators bet on 元高 (*yüan2 gao* = US-dollar~high/rise), 元低 (*yüan2 di1* = US-dollar~low/fall).