

# 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.

## This week: Words about animal symbolism

Pronunciation: *ma* (Putonghua, 3<sup>rd</sup> tone), *ma* (Cantonese 5<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: horse

馬 symbolizes swift/powerful advance. 馬上 (*ma shang* = horse~on = on horseback) means immediately. 人強馬壯 (*ren qiang ma zhuang* = men~powerful~horses~strong) describes a strong army/workforce. 上馬 (*shang ma* = ascend~horse = mount), 下馬 (*xia ma* = descend~horse = dismount) also mean launching/scraping projects.

過馬路 (*guo ma lu* = cross~horse~road) = crossing the (carriage/automobile) street. Horsemen 騎馬 (*qi ma* = ride~horse), perform 馬術 (*ma shu* = horse~methods/skills = equestrian arts). 賽馬 (*sai ma* = race~horses) = horse-racing.

馬上得天下 (*ma shang de tian xia* = horse~on~take~sky~below = take the world on horseback) describes great military conquerors. 騎牛搵馬 (*qi niu wen ma* = ride~ox~seek~horse) describes a dissatisfied lover/employee looking for someone/something better.