

# 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 cold snacks

Putonghua pronunciation: *bing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bing1*

Meanings: ice

冰 (radical 水 *shui3*) means ice/icy/iced: 冰雪 (*bing1 xue3* = ice-and-snow), 冰河 (*bing1 he2* = ice-river/glacier), 冰雕 (*bing1 diao1* = ice-sculpture). 冰山一角 (*bing1 shan1 yi1 jiao3* = ice-mountain-one-corner/angle/tip) = tip of the iceberg. 冷冰冰 (*leng3 bing1 bing1* = cold-icy-icy) describes frigid expression/ attitude.

冰箱 (*bing1 xiang1* = ice~box/refrigerator) keeps things 冰涼 (*bing1 liang2* = icy~cool). White wine needs 冰鎮 (*bing1 zhen4* = ice~anchored = chilled with ice-cubes). 威士忌加冰 (*wei1 shi4 ji4 jia1 bing1* = “Whiskey”-transliterated-add-ice) = Whiskey on the rocks.

冰棍兒 (*bing1 gun4 er0* = ice~stick~diminutive) = popsicle. 眼睛吃冰淇淋 (*yan3 jing1 chi4 bing1 qi2 lin2* = eyes~pupils~eat-ice~“cream”-transliterated = “eyes eat ice-cream”) = feasting your eyes on pretty girls.

by Diana Yue