

# 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 senile dementia

無

Putonghua pronunciation: *wu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mo4*

Meaning: none, without, lacking, nihility

無 (none) + adjective/noun/verb means opposite: 無形 (*wu2 xing2* = without-form), 無限 (*wu2 xian4* = un-limited). Regions 互通有無 (*hu4 tong1 you3 wu2* = mutually-transmit-have-have-nots = exchange resources). 無名氏 (*wu2 ming2 shi4* = no-name-person) = anonymous.

Pessimist feels 無奈 (*wu2 nai4* = no-how/what-handle/tackle = helpless), 虛無 (*xu1 wu2* = empty-none = nihilistic): 歲月無情 (*sui4 yue4 wu2 qing2* = years-months-no-feelings = Time is cruel), 世事無常 (*shi4 shi4 wu2 chang2* = world's-things-no-normal/always = Nothing is constant), 苦海無邊 (*ku3 hai3 wu2 bian1* = sorrows-sea-no-rim/edge = Sorrows never end).

Dementia patient 無法 (*wu2 fa3* = no-method = cannot) remember things, feels 無所謂 (*wu2 suo3 wei4* = no-to-say/call = doesn't matter).

by Diana Yue