

# 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 moving

家

Putonghua pronunciation: *jia1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ga1*

Meanings: family, home

家 means family/home: 家鄉 (*jia1 xiang1* = home~village), 家人 (*jia1 ren2* = family~persons/members). Speaker greets audience: “大家好!” (*da4 jia1 hao3* = big~family~good = “Hello, everybody!”)

Husband 回家 (*hui2 jia1* = returns~home) after work. 家裡 (*jia1 li3* = family~inside = at home), 家庭主婦 (*jia1 ting2 zhu3 fu4* = home~porch~principle~woman = family’s mistress = housewife) cooks dinner, does 家務 (*jia1 wu4* = family~errands = housework).

搬家 (*ban1 jia1* = move~family = moving house) involves packing 家私 (*jia1 si1* = home~private = furniture), 家電 (*jia1 dian4* = home~electric = home electric appliances). Adventurer abandons 家園 (*jia1 yuan2* = home~garden = home plots), 四海為家 (*si4 hai3 wei2 jia1* = four~seas~are~home = roams the world).