

# 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 Chinese sun god



Putonghua pronunciation: *ri4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yat6*

Meanings: sun, day

Pictogram 日 shows 口 (square/circle) enclosing dot/horizontal stroke, emitting 光 (*guang1*, light). 日 = 太陽 (*tai4 yang2* = ultimate-yang/male-essence) = sun (Latin sol). 日光 (*ri4 guang1*) = 陽光 (*yang2 guang1*) = sunlight. 太陽系 (*tai4 yang2 xi4* = ultimate-yang/male-essence-system) = solar system.

Peasants 日出而作, 日入而息 (*ri4 chu1 er2 zuo4, ri3 ru4 er2 xi1* = sun-out-and-work, sun-in-and-rest = work daily/diligently/regularly until nightfall). 指天誓日 (*zhi3 tian1 shi4 ri4* = point-heaven-vow/swear/oath-sun) = emphasize/swear by the sun.

Chinese myth describes 十日并出 (*shi2 ri4 bing4 chu1* = ten-suns-together-out/shining = ten suns appearing simultaneously). Under 烈日 (*lie4 ri4* = violent-sun = strong/oppressive sunlight), plants/animals/humans 曬死 (*shai4 si3* = sun-shine-tan-die = die from the sun's heat/glare).

by Diana Yue