

# 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 hungry stomach

缺

Putonghua pronunciation: *qüe1*  
Cantonese pronunciation: *kuet3*  
Meaning: lacking, missing, incomplete

缺 (radical 缶 *fou3*, pot + 夬 *qüe1*, broken) means 缺少 (*qüe1 shao3* = lack-short-of), 缺乏 (*qüe1 fa2* = lacking-impooverished): 缺水 (*qüe1 shui3* = lacking-water), 缺電 (*qüe1 dian4* = out-of-electricity), 缺人 (*qüe1 ren2* = lacking-people/staff), 缺氧 (*que1 yang3* = lacking-oxygen). 三缺一 (*san1 que1 yi1* = three-lack-one) describes three mahjong/bridge players lacking fourth player.

月圓月缺 (*yue4 yüan2 yue4 que1* = moon-round-moon-incomplete) = moon waxes and wanes. 缺點 (*qüe1 dian3* = lacking-point) = person/concept's defect. 缺陷 (*qüe1 xian4* = broken-sunken) = physical defect, but artists praise one-armed Venus de Milo's 缺憾美 (*qüe1 han4 mei3* = defect-regret- beauty = charm/appeal despite regrettable defect).

Zoo 缺錢 (*qüe1 qian2* = lacks-money), so animals 缺糧 (*qüe1 liang2* = lack-grains/food).

by Diana Yue