

# 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 anesthesia

Putonghua pronunciation: *xing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing2*

Meaning: wake, revive, sober, clear-headed

醒 (radical 酉 *you3*, liquor/wine) means 醒來 (*xing3 lai2* = wake-come = wake up), 甦醒 (*su1 xing3* = revive-wake-up), 醒著 (*xing3 zhe0* = awake-continuous = awake). Police 提醒 (*ti2 xing3* = remind-wake = reminds/cautions) drivers: drive only when 清醒 (*qing1 xing3* = clear-awake = sober/clear-headed). 酒醒 (*jiu3 xing3* = wine/liquor-wake) = come to, after hangover.

Preacher claims: 眾人皆醉我獨醒 (*zhong4 ren2 jie1 zui4 wo3 du2 xing3* = many-people-a-all-drunken-I-only-sober = "I'm the only sane/moral person left!") Sinners, 覺醒! (*jue2 xing3* = sense-wake = "Awake, repent!")

Strategist 一言驚醒夢中人 (*yi1 yan2 jing1 xing3 meng4 zhong1 ren2* = one-word/line-startle-wake-dream-inside-person = points out overlooked way/truth). Lobbyists 醒悟 (*xing3 wu4* = wake-understand = understand/are enlightened).

by Diana Yue