

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

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 abusive language

狗

Putonghua pronunciation: *gou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gau2*

Meaning: dog, hound

狗 = 犬 (*quān3*, dog): 公狗 (*gōng1 gou3* = male-dog), 母狗 (*mǔ3 gou3* = female-dog), 小狗 (*xiǎo3 gou3* = little-dogs/pups). 汪汪 (*wāng1 wāng1*) describes 狗吠 (*gǒu3 fēi4* = dog's-barking).

Anyone despised/condemned is 狗: 狼心狗肺 (*láng2 xīn1 gǒu3 fēi4* = wolf-heart-dog-lungs) = Cruel/vicious! 狗屁不通 (*gǒu3 pǐ4 bù4 tōng1* = dog-fart-not-reasonable) = Nonsense/rubbish! 狗娘養的 (*gǒu3 niāng2 yāng3 de0* = dog-mother-raised) = Son-of-a-bitch! 狗官 (*gǒu3 guān1* = dog-official) = Despicable bureaucrat! 狐群狗黨 (*hú2 qún2 gǒu3 dǎng3* = foxes-group-dogs-party) = band of scoundrels!

狡兔死，走狗烹 (*jiǎo3 tù4 sǐ3, zǒu3 gǒu3 pēng1* = sly-hare-dead, running-dog-cooked) describes cruel leader: he kills/crushes/devours lackeys/followers after they hounded down enemies for him.

by Diana Yue