

# 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 the Olympic Games



Putonghua pronunciation: **ao4**

Cantonese pronunciation: **o3**

Meanings: deep, profound

奧 (originally meaning house's niche/recess) now means deep/profound. 深奧 (**shen1 ao4** = deep~profound = profound/cryptic) sutras hide 奧秘 (**ao4 mi4** = deep~secrets), but intelligent scholar 盡窺堂奧 (**jin4 kui1 tang2 ao4** = thoroughly~peep/see~hall~niche = penetrates the deepest meanings).

古希臘 (**gu3 Xi1 La4** = ancient~"Greece"-transliterated) believed gods live on 奧林匹斯山 (**Ao4 Lin2 Pi3 Si1 shan1** = "Olympus"-transliterated~hill/mountain = Mount Olympus). 倫敦 (**Lun2 Dun2** = "London"-transliterated) hosts 2012 奧林匹克世運會 (**Ao4 Lin2 Pi3 Ke1 shi4 yun4 hui4** = "Olympic"-transliterated~world~sports~meet = Olympic Games, abbr. 奧運會 **Ao4 yun4 hui4** = Olympic~sports~meets).

運動員 (**yun4 dong4 yuan2** = move~act~member = athletes) compete. Commentators explain each sport's 奧妙 (**ao4 miao4** = deep~wonder = peculiar knack/skill).

by Diana Yue