

# 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.

## This week: Words about dressmaking

針

(radical 金 *jīn* = gold/metal)  
Pronunciation: *zhen* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *jam* (Cantonese, 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: needle, pin

Housewives use 縫衣針 (*feng yi zhen* = sew~clothes~needle = sewing needles), 織針 (*zhi zhen* = weave/knit~needle = knitting needles). Garment factories manufacture 針織 (*zhen zhi* = needle~weave/knit = knitwear). 別針 (*bie zhen* = pin-on~needle) = jewelry pins.

Opposing speakers 針鋒相對 (*zhen feng xiang dui* = needle~point~mutual~confront = challenge each other's points), 針對 (*zhen dui* = needle~confront = focus sharply on) opponent's weakness. 一針見血 (*yi zhen jian xue* = one~needle~see~blood) describes comments which hit the nail on the head.

Nurses 打針 (*da zhen* = hit~needle = give injections). The Chinese invented 針灸 (*zhen jiu* = needle~heat = acupuncture and moxibustion), use 針刺麻醉 (*zhen ci ma zui* = needle~prick~numb~drunk = acupuncture anaesthesia) in surgery.

by Diana Yue