

# 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 antiques

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meaning: vessel, container, utensil, ware, instrument, appliance

器 (four 口 *kou3*, mouths/openings) means 器具 (*qi4 jū4* = vessel-utensil): 樂器 (*yüe4 qi4* = musical-instrument), 兵器 (*bing1 qi4* = army-utensil = weapon), 電器 (*dian4 qi4* = electric-appliance), 儀器 (*yi2 qi4* = gauge-apparatus). 器官 (*qi4 guan1* = utensil-commander) = body organs: 生殖器 (*sheng1 zhi2 qi4* = male/female reproductive-organ).

Ancients used 青銅器 (*qing1 tong2 qi4* = green-bronze-vessels/utensils) as 禮器 (*li3 qi4* = ritualistic-utensils), 容器 (*rong2 qi4* = containers-vessels). Pyramids contain 冥器 (*ming2 qi4* = netherworld/funerary-utensils).

陶瓷器 (*tao2 ci2 qi4* = clay-porcelain-ware = ceramics) production inspired idioms: 不成器 (*bu4 cheng2 qi4* = not-formed-utensil = substandard/failed person), 大器晚成 (*da4 qi4 wan3 cheng2* = big-utensil-late-formed = talented person achieves success late in life).

by Diana Yue