

# 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 military parades



Putonghua pronunciation: *shi* 4

Cantonese pronunciation: *si* 6

Meanings: man, scholar, soldier

士 means man. However, 女士 (*nu3 shi1* = woman~man) is “madam”. 士人 (*shi4 ren2* = scholar~person) = scholars: 學士 (*xue2 shi4* = study~scholar = bachelor-degree holder), 碩士 (*shuo2 shi4* = abundant~scholar = master-degree holder), 博士 (*bo2 shi4* = broad/erudite~scholar = PhD-holder).

士官 (*shi4 guan1* = 軍官 *jun1 guan1* = army~officers) lead 士兵 (*shi4 bing1* = man~soldier = infantrymen/privates/lower-rank-soldiers). 勇士 (*yong3 shi4* = brave~man) = fierce fighter e.g. Samson. 武士 (*wu3 shi4* = military~man) = armed-fighters/knights/samurais. 死士 (*si3 shi4* = die~man) are mission-killers prepared to fight to death.

Seeing generals 身先士卒 (*shen1 xian1 shi4 zu2* = body~before-soldiers~infantry = going ahead of subordinates in battle) makes 士氣大振 (*shi4 qi4 da4 zhen4* = soldiers' spirit/morale~greatly~boosted).