

# 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 hawkers

Putonghua pronunciation: *wang* 4

Cantonese pronunciation: *wong* 6

Meanings: robust, prosperous

旺 (日 *re*4, sun + 王 *wang*2, king) indicates high heat/prosperity. 爐火正旺 (*lu*2 *huo*3 *zheng*4 *wang*4 = furnace-fire-right-now-hot/intense) describes a blazing furnace. 生意興旺 (*sheng*1 *yi*4 *xing*1 *wang*4 = livelihood-rise-robust) means doing good business.

旺季 (*wang*4 *ji*4 = robust-season) means high-yielding business seasons, e.g. Christmas). 旺鋪 (*wang*4 *pu*4 = robust-shop) means shop flooded with customers/business. Hawkers concentrate in 旺區 (*wang*4 *qu*1 = busy-districts). 旺銷 (*wang*4 *xiao*1 = robust-sell) describes hot sale items.

Match-makers recommend brides who can 旺夫益子 (*wang*4 *fu*1 *yi*1 *zi*3 = prosper-husband-benefit-sons = help husband/sons achieve success/prosperity). Feng-shui masters recommend properties which can 旺丁 (*wang*4 *ding*1 = prosper-sons = increase inhabitants'male offsprings), 旺財 (*wang*4 *cai*2 = prosper-wealth = increase inhabitants'wealth).

by Diana Yue