

# 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 shopping malls



Putonghua pronunciation: *chuang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cheung4*

Meanings: window

窗 = 窗子 (*chuang1 zi0* = window~diminutive) has 窗框 (*chuang1 kuang1* = window~frame), 玻璃 (*bo1 li2* = glass), 窗台 (*chuang1 tai2* = window~sill). Air/wind passes through 窗戶 (*chuang1 hu4* = window~door = window-opening).

Shops have 櫥窗 (*chu2 chuang1* = cabinet~window) = display windows. 櫥窗設計 (*chu2 chuang1 she4 ji4* = cabinet~window~instal~plan = window-display/dressing) uses 人形 (*ren2 xing2* = human~form = mannequins), 燈飾 (*deng1 shi4* = lamp~decorate = lighting). 看櫥窗 (*kan4 chu2 chuang1* = look-at~shop~windows = window-shopping) is enjoyable.

窗口 (*chuang1 kou3* = window~mouth) means window-opening or town displaying/exporting hinterland's produce/image. 打開天窗說亮話 (*da3 kai1 tian1 chuang1 shuo4 liang4 hua4* = hit-open~sky~window~speak~lit-up~words = open skylight, talk openly) means “Frankly speaking...”

by Diana Yue