

# 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 borrowing arrows

缺

Putonghua pronunciation: *que1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kuet3*

Meanings: lack

缺 = 缺少 (*que1 shao3* = lack~short-of). Poor people 缺錢 (*que1 qian3* = lack~money). High-altitude regions 缺氧 (*que1 yang3* = lack~oxygen). 缺點 (*que1 dian3* = lack~point) = weakness/flip. 缺陷 (*que1 xian4* = lack~cave-in) = body's/scheme's defect.

Slanderers/cheats are 缺德 (*que1 de2* = lack~virtue = mean/unkind). 月圓月缺 (*yue4 yuan2 yue4 que1* = moon~round~moon~incomplete) = moon's wax and wane. 寧缺毋濫 (*ning2 que1 wu2 lan4* = prefer~lack~don't~overflow) = "Too few rather than too many" philosophy.

In ancient China's 三國 (*san1 guo2* = Three-Kingdoms) period (3rd century A.D.), 蜀國 (*Shu2 guo2* = Shu-Kingdom) and 吳國 (*Wu2 guo2* = Wu-Kingdom) prepared for big battle against 魏國 (*Wei4 guo2* = Wei-Kingdom), but 缺箭 (*que1 jian4* = lacked~arrows).

by Diana Yue