

# 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 flowers

開

Putonghua pronunciation: *kai1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hoi1*

Meanings: open, develop

開 (radical 門 *men2*, pair of door-panels) means open: 開門! (*kai1 men2* = Open the door!), 開始 (*kai1 shi3* = open~origin = beginning/inauguration), 開口 (*kai1 kou3* = open~mouth = speak/voice opinion), 開心 (*kai1 xin1* = open~heart = feeling happy). Pioneers 開拓 (*kai1 tuo4* = open-up~expand) borders. 開放 (*kai1 fang4* = open~release) describes open-minded/uninhibited/liberal person/policy.

開花 (*kai1 hua1* = open~flower) = bloom: 半開 (*ban4 kai1* = half~bloom), 盛開 (*sheng4 kai1* = grand~open = full bloom). 開花結果 (*kai1 hua1 jie2 guo3* = bloom~flowers~produce~fruit) = marriage/labor getting progress and positive result.

開門見山 (*kai1 men2 jian4 shan1* = open~door~see~mountain) = speak out directly. 雲開見月 (*yun2 kai1 jian4 yue4* = clouds~open/part~see/appear~moon) = hardships/obstacles finally dispelled.

by Diana Yue