

# 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 stockmarket gambling

押

Putonghua pronunciation: *ya1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *aat3*

Meanings: sign, place in custody, escort, pledge, mortgage, place bet, atake

押 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3*, hand) = sign: 畫押 (*hua4 ya1* = inscribe~sign/signature as pledge). Guards 押運 (*ya1 yün4* = securely~escort/transport) prisoner/goods.

Cash-shy gambler pawns valuables at 押店 (*ya1 dian4* = pledge-guaranty~shop = 當舖 *dang4 pu4* = pawn~shop). Mortgagee 抵押 (*di3 ya1* = substitute~pledge = mortgages) apartment to bank as 抵押品 (*di3 ya1 pin3* = substitute~pledge~thing = guaranty).

Roulette-players 押注 (*ya1 zhu4* = pledge~bet) = place stakes: 押中 (*ya1 zhong4* = place~hit-mark = hit the right number), 押錯 (*ya1 cuo4* = place~wrong = miss). Desperate speculator makes one last fling, 押上 (*ya1 shang4* = pledge~up = places as stake) all remaining assets. Faust 押 (his soul) 給 (*ya1 .. gei3* = pawns~his-soul~to) the Devil.